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**Framing Comparison of the Li Gang Incident and the Diaoyu Island Dispute
between Social Networking Sites and Mainstream Media in China**

**By
Ying Han**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism & Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:
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ABSTRACT

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) offer a unique platform to communicate based on real identity. Under the authoritarian regime in China, SNSs have become a tool to share and communicate alternative political information. This study seeks to identify the framing differences between SNSs and mainstream media by comparing the framing of two recent cases, the Li Gang incident as domestic news and the Diaoyu Island dispute as international news. The largest SNS based on real identity in China was selected to represent SNS websites, and *People's Daily online* was selected as the representative of mainstream media. Results show that frames used on *Renren* and *People's Daily Online* were different at large. *Renren* was overall more critical towards officials, and extremely positive in reporting powerless victims. Furthermore, *Renren* tended to present a one-sided story and questioned censorship and credibility of the mainstream media in China openly.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the western world, especially the United States, the media are generally regarded as free. Their role is to serve democracy. However, many studies have suggested that mainstream media, public or private, are often apparatuses not of democracy, but of hegemony (Harcup, 2003; Gitlin, 1980; McChesney, 1999). Herman, Chomsky and Lewis (1997) criticized the mainstream media and their conservativeness and the control of media by the big conglomerates in the video: *The liberal bias*. Indeed, research into news organizations and routines has well-documented that the news product tends to privilege mainstream positions and serves the elites, rather than promote a “marketplace of ideas” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 33).

The disappointment towards mainstream media’s hierarchical information flow and the eventual popularization of the Internet in 1990s shifted the focus to online democracy and prompted hope that the new computer-mediated communication could promote democracy (Tai, 2006). Unlike traditional media, which are characterized by “unidimensional, centralized, pyramidal and hierarchical” communications (Tai, 2006, p. 177), the Internet brings in a multidimensional environment and also fosters decentralization, pluralism and democracy (Hanson, & Narula, 1990). Furthermore, Poster (1997) noticed that the decentralized nature of the Internet provides an alternative channel for the public to move away from the established political communication which is centered on broadcasting media to a new “cyborg politics” that disrupts the traditional status, authority and power.

Accordingly, Kahn and Kellner (2004) studied bloggers’ ability in wielding political influence on the public decision making in the United States and argued such

communication has the potential to establish a “virtually democratic” community.

However, theory and practice of public opinion in the Internet era has been heavily grounded in the Western democratic polity where media are allegedly free and independent from government control.

In authoritarian systems, the mass media are in tight control of the government (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; Hallin, & Mancini, 2004). Especially in China, the media are strongly censored, usually serve as mass mobilization tools to guide public opinions in support of Party policies, and further conduct favorable propaganda for Party ideology (Dai, 2000). Since every publication has to be approved by the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China (The State Council, 2001), which is a controlled apparatus of the government, there are literally no alternative publications for political content. In addition, the surviving alternative publications do not call for democracy and political reform and instead focus on environmental education and other non-political public issues (Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Cao, 2007).

Therefore, the dissident voices are mostly expressed and communicated online. With the diffusion of Internet, and computer mediated communication technologies, especially the emergence of various social media such as blogs, Bulletin Boards Systems (BBSs), microblogging, photo sharing, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and so on (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), more and more Chinese people now find a way to express their alternative political voice, and access to alternative political opinions. Tai (2006) cited Morgan Stanley's The China Internet Report which identified the public's flocking to the Internet as a sign that embodies the opening up in a culture where self-expression

and interaction have not been hallmarks. According to Jin (2008) and He (2007), online communication on the Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) and blogs empowered the public to challenge the authorities of local government, and to prompt revisions of legislation, which exemplified huge progress for China's democratization stimulated by new media. This argument is confirmed by Han & Zhang's (2009) study of the ban of the Starbucks in the Forbidden City, where they found that a proposal on a weblog widely escalated into a public campaign, and then the case caught the attention of the mainstream media.

Due to the decentralized structure of social media, the censorship towards social media is not as effective as towards print, audio, or video publications. Although the power of the social media still needs time to be explored, the recent uprisings in Egypt and the Middle East, where social media, especially Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, functioned as a platform to organize, coordinate and support their uprising with words, pictures, and videos taken by mobile devices (Cafferty, 2011), are perfect examples of how social media can be critical in enabling political movement. The Chinese government instantly realized the transforming political potential of social media and how a single spark can start a prairie fire as Chairman Mao cited to describe the unstoppable trend of revolution in 1930s, and shortly censored the keyword "Egypt uprising" in the search results in the hope that the country's citizens will not get any big ideas of what's going on in other nations (Moore, 2011; Kan, 2011).

As many scholars observed, the Internet can potentially democratize a society (Becker & Slaton, 2000; Locke, 1999). This trend has been reinforced again by the surge of SNSs, where netizens can communicate political information as well as other information based on their real identity.

Therefore, it is significant to ask what characteristics SNSs have in political communication and how they are different from mainstream media in China. As Abbott and Yarbrough (1999) have concluded, the way people learn things is dependent on the structure of the communication system in a society. Under an authoritarian regime with strong censorship, SNSs can perform as a platform to circulate alternative information or news by comparing framing of two recent cases: the Diaoyu Island dispute and the Li Gang incident between the largest SNS in China, *Renren.com*, and *People's Daily Online*, sponsored by *People's Daily*, China's largest newspaper and the organ of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Furthermore, the study examined censorship and credibility of the mainstream media, and analyzed the factors that influence times being shared and read on *Renren*.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Democracy

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a Government without Newspapers, or Newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

Thomas Jefferson, 1787

In modern democracies, the media are expected to facilitate democracy through providing pluralistic information necessary for the public to make choices and participate in public debates (Manning, 2001). The extent to which the less powerful and politically marginal can obtain media access is one of the most significant debates concerning democratic processes.

Democracy is literally impossible without media (Sparks, 1998) for basically two reasons. First, media perform essential political, social, economic, and cultural functions in modern democracies and foster deliberation, diversity, and ensure accountability in the society. Media ensure the public has access to information essential to the health of democracy so that they will make “responsible and informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Secondly, the information provided by the media serves as a ‘checking function’ by ensuring that the elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of the voters” (Center for Democracy and Governance, 1999).

Ideally, the media should promote a marketplace of ideas. However, the media in an open society, such as United States, cannot always achieve this end. Early in 1990s, Chomsky argued the U.S. media serve the elite interests instead of the “ignorant masses

(Chomsky, 1992, p 369).” This statement is precisely accurate in authoritarian China where media serve as the mouthpiece of the government since the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949.

Media System in China

A significant moment in the development of communication theory occurred when four theories of the press were proposed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in 1956. Concerning the relation between press and society (McQuail, 2010), they categorized the media in four kinds: “authoritarian”, “libertarian”, “social responsibility” and “Soviet-communist” theory. An important aspect of the whole project was the proposition that the ‘press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control’ (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Later, Blumber and Gurevitch (1995) proposed four dimensions of media for comparative analysis: (1) degree of state control over mass media organization; (2) degree of mass media partisanship; (3) degree of media-political elite integration; and (4) the nature of the legitimating creed of media institutions. A similar measurement was proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004). In all the measurements, state intervention in the media is clearly a critical shaping force of media systems.

Based on the four theories of the press, China roughly falls under a mix of the authoritarian system where the presence of strong state control over media is prevalent and the communist model where the government owns most of the media in the country. In the media sector, as Chu (1994) described, the Chinese Communist Party functions as the “owner, manager, and the practitioner.” Although the four theories of the press fail to

capture “transition” models and the media are changing constantly instead of being static, the four measurements can still reflect the media system at large.

In China, the news media are owned by the central government or the state, are required to follow Communist party and government policies, and act as "the bridge between the party and the people" (Yin & Payne, 2004, p. 373). The government regulates the news media through the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China. The agency has the right to issue or revoke news media licenses (CCEC.GOV, N.D.), establish press regulations and laws, and appoint or remove chief editors (Chu, 2010).

After the Reform and Opening-up in the late 1970s, the Chinese media have transformed dramatically. The core of the media is still state-controlled, but the government stopped subsidizing the media and the market is gradually exerting its influences on the development and modernization of the media industry (Zhao, 1998). Circulation and advertisements are the main revenues for the media, and the content is largely decided by the play of the state and the market. Needless to say, the market is subordinate to the state since the state has the power to regulate media's performance and even revoke its license. The party “sets the politically sensitive agenda [for] the media to guide public opinion,” while “the money takes charge of the non-politically sensitive domain” (Chen & He, 1998).

The failure of the mainstream media to present a holistic view of the society turns people to alternative media to participate in online political debate about domestic as well as international news and events. Scholars constantly examine the influences of online communication and predict that the online communication could transform the rigid

authoritarian system to a more democratic one (even in a democratic society, online communication may have the same impact).

Online Blogs, SNSs, and BBSs as Alternative Media

There is a relatively small body of research on the content or political effects of alternative media (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2003; Fuchs, 2010; Harcup, 2003; Platon & Deuze, 2003), which makes generalizations on political outcomes quite difficult. At the present time, the definition of alternative media is still murky and scholars are still grappling with what alternative media are. Atton (2002, 2003), Downing (2001), and Fuchs (2010) have made significant headway in this field, but the concept is still broad and open to discussion.

Synthesizing works of alternative media and thus creating a clearer point of distinction, Tsfaty and Peri (2006, p. 170) wrote, “In sum, mainstream media are the largest economic (public or private) corporations aiming to reach the widest possible audience and representing the central national value system and Weltanschauung (‘worldview’). Nonmainstream media are simply all other news organizations that are available to the audience in a given society (which differ from mainstream media to varying extents).” For the purposes of this study, alternative media are subsumed as any components of nonmainstream media as defined above.

The first attempt to tackle alternative media is made by Armstrong (1981), who sees the underground press, a participatory medium, as antecedent of alternative media to address sensitive social problems that were neglected in the mainstream media at the time. Since these early studies, Downing (2001) and other scholars have incorporated theories of power and hegemony into the alternative media construct, expanded alternative

media's function as not only a voice for social movement, but also a form of resistance to hegemonic structure in society. The resistance can be carried out as social movement, and oftentimes, it is a form of expression that triggers diverse alternative media production (Atkinson, 2010).

Rauch (2007) concluded the previous scholars' efforts in studying alternative media and defined alternative media in four dimensions, and they are: the content provide (devotion to oppositional issues, events and opinions not regularly advocated elsewhere), the channel through which content is provided (such as photocopied flyers, pod-casts or hand-made buttons), the sources featured in that content (including unofficial, poor, minority and dissident voices), or the modes and values they espouse (citizen participation, direct action, collective decision-making, etc.) (Haas, 2004; Hamilton, 2000; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004).

Applying the definition of alternative media in China, it is easy to figure out that there are literally no true alternative publications that exist publicly since all the media must be approved by the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China, and all the publications that are permitted should in one way or another serve the interests of the government. There's also no statistical information about underground publication. Therefore, the alternative media in China can only be found on the Internet, especially after the booming of Blogs, Social Network Sites and the Bulletin Board Systems.

In the new media era, Sayre et al. (2010) demonstrated such a phenomenon in which user-created YouTube videos actually influenced the agenda of mainstream media on a given issue. Thus, when Bennett and his colleagues wrote that alternative media

reach “few opinion makers or average citizens” (2004, p. 451), there is historical and contemporary evidence that its influence can indeed be observed.

The Development of Internet and Social Media in China

Surpassing the U.S., China has the largest number of Internet users in the world since 2008 (Liang, & Lu, 2010). The newest *China Internet Network Information Center* (CNNIC, 2010) released statistical report on the Internet development shows that the population of Internet users has increased to 0.42 billion in 2010 at an annual growth of 31.8%.

The rapid growth of the Internet is a double-edged to the Chinese government. On the one hand, the growth brings about numerous economic gains with the flourishing of Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Consumer (B2C), and also such social facilitation as the development of e-government and Business-to-Government (B2G). On the other hand, the Internet, which enables a decentralized style of communication, also poses significant potential challenges to censorship because of the breadth of online content, whose sources are often remote from Chinese jurisdiction and the rapidity with which sources of content can be moved (Zittrain & Edelman, 2003). As the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof (2005) concluded: “it’s the Chinese leadership itself that is digging the Communist Party’s grave, by giving the Chinese people broadband.”

Social media, such as photo sharing, social bookmarking, video sharing, blogs, Bulletin Board Systems and social networking sites, enable creation and circulation of content, especially politically sensitive content, and also wide public discussion over such issues. Social media, besides serving their own purpose, become media and tools for political change in China, but not the cause for the change (Pan, 2006).

Drezner (2005) pointed out that in open societies, the Internet serves as an enhancer of the power of the civil society, while in authoritarian societies, the fear of the Internet's ability to redirect "information cascades" will force governments to have strong control over the Internet. However, in the meantime, the governments "deny themselves the opportunity to exploit the vast economic potential of the information society." (p. 2) Facing the potential threats, the Chinese government decided to take a strong position and has issued several regulations to control the Internet and censor the information that is critical to the development of a "harmonious society."

Nevertheless, the development of Internet has offered many critical advantages in facilitating a democratization of information flow through two-way communications and has allowed the public to participate in political deliberations (Song, 2007). In the book *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*, Tai (2006) discovered four main changes that the Internet brought, which are a relatively free platform, a steady and core cohort of opinion leaders swaying public opinions, the learning and interaction among Net pals, and a "barometer for the politicians, government functionaries and lawmakers to gauge public opinions" (p. 42). For example, in 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao promised that the government officials should look into the worthy questions and suggestions posted by Chinese users online (Tai, 2006).

The Internet users adopt the self-designated name "netizens", a term that implies that they exert citizen basic rights, such as freedom of speech and political participation, online (Zhou & Moy, 2007). Netizens often see themselves as responsible citizens who shoulder the responsibility to help the disadvantaged, to redress the government's negligence, and so on. Netizens show great interest in events that did not receive proper

attention in the media due to journalists' narrow judgment of newsworthiness or censorship or any other possible reasons, and discuss them intensively online with a different perspective or frame.

The Development of SNSs

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) first emerged in the United States, where information communication technologies are most advanced and the buzz of Web 2.0 was first emerged, and soon SNSs diffused to other parts of the world (Jin, 2008). The success of SNSs in the United States gained intense attention from Chinese entrepreneurs, and soon after the booming of SNSs in the United States, Chinese networking sites like Xiaonei or 51.com mushroomed mostly among college students. Jin (2008) noted that SNSs were not as popular as the traditional online Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs), which is an online forum where users can upload and download software and data, read news and bulletins, respond to specific stories, and exchange messages with other users. However, recent surveys and other studies found that *Renren* (originally *Xiaonei*) has already become the most visited site among college students (CNNIC, 2009).

The most successful SNS in China first became popular among college students with the name Xiaonei, which means "on campus." Later on, as Xiaonei became more and more influential, in 2009, it enlarged its group of users to everyone and changed the name to *Renren*, which means "everyone."

As of February 2011, *Renren* has 160 million registered users (life.renren.com, 2011) among the 420 million Internet users in China. Since *Renren* was initially aimed at college students, its users are mostly of ages 19 to 26 (CNNIC, 2009), that is to say, most of the users belong to the group most closely watched after the Tiananmen Square

protests, which were mostly carried out and mobilized by young college students. The government knows too well that college students have the potential to contest its authority and destabilize the authoritarian regime. Therefore, in 2005, the Ministry of Education required all College Bulletin Board Systems sites to serve as an exclusive, on-campus communication platform based on real-name registration. The implication of this reform is that the connection with the outside alumni and other citizens was cut off, and the users could not venture to explicitly express themselves for fear of being tracked down. However, the emergence of SNSs saved the Chinese college students from the isolation of the college Bulletin Board Systems. At the very beginning, much like Facebook, only college students could register on Xiaonei.com and offered them a broader platform to express themselves and communicate with peers. Now, with its changed name, *Renren*, Xiaonei broadened its users to the whole population in China.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of online media has drawn a lot of attention to its potential to support and contest the mainstream media. Several scholarly studies looked into the uses and gratification of Blogs, the political significance of Blogs and Bulletin Board Systems. However, most researches on Chinese SNSs focused on uses and gratifications, such as self-presentation or disclosure (Jia, Zhao, & Lin, 2010; Chu, & Choi, 2010), cross comparison between different SNSs (Zhang, 2010) and market-driven topics, such as the use of SNSs for promotion of products (Shao, & Gao, 2010), and barely on political issues.

Blogs and Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs)

Early research on blogs debated much about whether blogs, a kind of participatory media, are ultimately a force for democratization (MacKinnon, 2007).

However, apart from bringing new forms of online civic discourses online, blogs' role in political changes still depend on how people choose to use them and also to what extent the Chinese government succeeds in controlling the use of blogs for political dissidence (MacKinnon, 2007).

Research conducted by He (2007) on blogs found that blogs are mainly a medium to fulfill the gratification of self-expression for Chinese blog authors, not dedicated to the supply of useful information, let alone serving as news resources. For the authors, blogs fulfill this desire by having their personal memoirs published, offering personal gratification, publicity and perhaps a sense of assurance that these private thoughts matter. For readers, blogs serve as a means to contact one's friends and family members, to gain information and knowledge, and even to sustain the delusion that in reading blogs, they free themselves from China's censorship regime. Furthermore, Chinese blog readers expect more from blogs than merely fulfilling a voyeuristic gratification. However, most blog authors failed to supply their readers with sufficient and useful information.

According to Tang (2009), Chinese bloggers use the platform to publish sensitive sexual content and satire of politicians, and exercise their freedom of speech in the blogosphere. In addition, though exaggeration and excess, blogs question the normal and the official and have become a popular culture (Ma, 2000, p.28). In this way, bloggers participate in the political process (Klinenberg and Benzecry, 2005, p.11), and thus form "a public sphere to negotiate with political domination, gently pushing the state to allow more social spaces to flourish" (Tang, 2009, p.10).

Furthermore, He (2007) looked into the audiences' perception of the freedom of blogs and discovered that the blogs are deemed as the freest medium and thus viewed as a

medium alternative to the rigid and censored mainstream media. The researcher also found that audiences take blogs as “a serious source of information,” partly because they think the information on the blogs is not censored as much as the mainstream media and do not realize that the blog writers are self-censoring the information in order to publish it online. He did not dig more into the question why the audience believe in blogs regardless of the obvious lack of reliability and offered as a possible reason the decreasing credibility of the mainstream media.

While blog users can write anonymously online, the “free-for-all structure of the BBS makes it possible for people wanting to speak freely online to hide in the large crowd of fake user-names and cloak their anonymity more successfully (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 36).” Although it is expected that the companies or academic institutions hosting BBS should monitor and censor dissident political information, the sheer volume of postings makes it impossible to censor all the dissident information. Software detecting sensitive words is developed and used widely on BBS, however, BBS users can easily get around by using pinyin, or mix symbols, in between sensitive words. Successfully posted politically sensitive information and opinion can exist for hours and sometimes even days before being discovered and taken down (MacKinnon, 2007). For this reason, users such as political activists or frustrated journalists in China have generally turned to BBS websites as the place to post newspaper stories and even photographs that are too politically sensitive to get past editors. “The BBS are also the place where politically-minded people of all professions have tended to go for political debates and discussions (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 36).”

Furthermore, Agichtein et al. (2008) conducted an analysis on Yahoo! Answers and found that the website is usually accurate in predicting high-quality items close to that of humans. On SNSs, it is hard to say whether there are some techniques to identify the potential popular posts, however, the maneuvers in predicting and promoting popularity can only influence the availability of the information, one of the many reasons people share and read. There are other elements that decide whether a person shares or reads the post, such as interests, relevance, trend, etc. And it is meaningful to ask what kind of information suits the mass tastes and tends to be shared and read widely.

Fortunately, *Renren* happens to count times being shared and read to show the popularity of the story. Times being shared is counted by counting the number of times people actually click the option “share this with my friends.” However, as long as you opened the story, *Renren* would count one time as being read. Therefore, the times stories being shared and read on *Renren* is positively correlated. If a story is shared by more people, more people had the chance to read or view it from their friends. The increasing probability of reaching out to more people would naturally lead to increased readership. Therefore, the number of times being shared is always lower than the number of times being read. This can be accounted to the fact that people will first read text or watch video before they decide to share the story. Hence, the first research questions of this thesis set out to explore the following:

Research Question 1: What variables predict *Renren* story’s popularity? Are superficiality, type of media and use of emotion-laden words correlated with high shares and high reads?

Framing Differences

During the first decade of the Internet's prominence from the early 1990s, most online content resembled traditional published material and the majority of Internet users were consumers of content created by a relatively small amount of publishers. Entering early 2000s, there was a transformation in the type of content online, and user-generated content has become increasingly popular on the Internet (Agichtein et al., 2008).

With more and more users participating in content creation, user-generated content domains mushroomed in many formats such as blogs, web forums, social bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing communities, as well as social networking platforms such as Facebook and MySpace, which offers a combination of all of these with an “emphasis on the relationships among the users of the community” (Agichtein et al., 2008, p. 1).

Content on social media is different from the traditional content on websites in “style, quality, authorship, and explicit support for social graphs (Bian, Liu, Agichtein, & Zha, 2008).” The distribution of quality of content in social media has high variance: from very high-quality items to low-quality, sometimes abusive content (Agichtein et al., 2008). However, the rich structure of social media presents inherent advantages over traditional media websites.

A similar study was conducted by Song (2007), who found a clear difference in covering a hit-and-run by the US military in Korea between online content and mainstream conservative media's reports. Further, he concluded that the composition of news sources, and the frames used to make sense of the issues were disparate. Online

news content was progressive and also played an important role in escalating reactions to the deaths of the two schoolgirls into a broader anti-US sentiment.

The user-centered blogs, BBS, and SNSs make it easy and possible for users themselves to create online news or cite from some mainstream media or other sources, and furthermore (Argenti, & Barnes, 2009), there are less surveillance and direct censorship in creating and disseminating news from the users' end. Therefore, it is to be expected that the framing of online news from blogs, BBS, and SNSs is different from the online mainstream media.

As noted previously, before SNSs emerged in China, people mostly communicated online anonymously or using fake names, and constantly had concerns about censorship (Jin, 2008). Although SNSs are also censored by the government, they allow users to see that most people around them have the same concerns (MacKinnon, 2010) and the law does not punish numerous offenders as the Chinese proverb says. Therefore, in this unique platform, people seem to grow bolder, and critical information is actively circulating around. In addition, there might be a discrepancy between the public's frames of an issue and the official frames.

Framing Theory

The concept of framing was first introduced to social science by Goffman and Bateson in 1974 and has become a widely adopted theoretic approach in communication field as scholars sought to determine how news is presented or "framed" and what exactly are the effects of framing practices (McQuail, 2010).

As Schramm (1949) defined, news is "an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework" of an event or issue (p. 288), which can be viewed from a variety of

perspectives, and this is also the major premise that framing theory is based on (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing is essentially the communication of this construction (Adam, 2010) and in the process of building frames many factors can influence the structural qualities of news frames (De Vreese, 2005). Internal to journalism, unconscious personal ideologies, self-censorship, organizational structures and so on determine how the frame is made (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). External to journalism, continuous interaction between journalists and elites (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978) and social movements (Cooper, 2002; Snow & Benford, 1992) also influence the frame-building. Scheufele (1999) concluded five factors that potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue: (a) social norms and values, (b) organizational pressures and constraints, (c) pressures of interest groups, (d) journalistic routines, and (e) ideological or political orientations of journalists. At last, “the outcomes of the frame-building process are the frames manifest in the text” (De Vreese, 2005).

Across time, the definition of framing constantly developed. Frames are defined as ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse by Gitlin (1980, p.7)’, and as ‘interpretative packages’ that give meaning to an issue by Gamson and Modigliani (1989). At the center of the “interpretative package” is ‘central organizing idea, or *frame*, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989:3, italics in original). Building on the existed literature, Entman (1993) put forward the most widely adopted definition of framing and saw framing as essentially involves “selection and salience” and to frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in

such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/ or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p.52).

Framing, unlike agenda-setting which deals with salience of issue, deals with what the media cover and how much coverage they afford, deals with perceptions (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005), and how the media cover the issue and suggest how to think about it (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001, p. 69). Many scholars tried to identify what constitutes a frame in a news story. Entman (1993, p.52) suggested that not only the presence of “certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” can be examined as frames, but also the absence of such elements can be viewed as frames. A similar argument of journalists construing frames is proposed by Shah et al. (2002, p. 367) by noting that journalists’ “choice about language, quotations, and relevant information lead to emphasis upon certain features of a news story and, in turn, significantly structure citizens’ responses to public events and issues by encouraging certain ‘train of thought’”.

Frames are identified by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) as devices that condense information and offer a “media package” of an issue. Framing devices oftentimes refer to metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p.3). According to De Vreese (2005), the most comprehensive empirical approach is developed by Tankard (2001, p. 101) who listed 11 framing mechanisms or focal points for identifying and measuring news frames: headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding statements and paragraphs.

After synthesizing previous research on framing, two major types of frames were identified: *issue-specific* frames and *generic* frames (de Vreese, 2005). *Issue-specific* frames refer to frames that are pertinent only to specific topics or events, while *generic* frames refer to frames that can “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). This line of research was developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) who quoted Neuman’s definition of news frames as “conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information” (p. 94) and viewed previous studies and summarized five generic frames, which will be explored in this thesis: the *responsibility* frame, the *human interest* frame, the *conflict* frame, the *economy consequences* frame, and the *morality* frame.

The *responsibility* frame “presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group”; the *conflict* frame “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest”; the *human interest* frame “brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem”; the *economic consequences* frame “reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual group, institution, region, or country”; and the *morality* frame “puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions” (Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95-96).

Disparity between Rich and Poor

While the world marvels at the pace of China’s economic growth, the Chinese government’s emphasis on profit rather than overall progress toward a more open and

democratic society has contributed to many financial and social problems such as worsening inequality and rampant government official corruption (Cheng, 2006).

The most commonly used measure of inequality is the Gini coefficient (Sloman, 2000), which reflects complete equality at “0” and complete inequality at “1” (World Bank, N.D.). In 2009, the Gini coefficient reached 0.47 in China, surpassing the recognized warning level of 0.4, which is a critical threshold that could lead to social unrest (GOV.cn, 2011; China Daily, 2010).

Since the nature of the distribution of goods and service in China follows socialism ideology, which boasts equality in the distribution of wealth and a peoples’ government (Marx, & Engels, 1848), the reality that wealth is concentrated in the hands of an exceptionally small group and government’s corruption and abuse of power pose a sharp and ironic comparison with the ideological guidelines and further push the social conflict to the verge of breaking off.

In order to promote a “harmonious society” and “social stability,” Chinese official media try to downplay such issues touching the privileges of government and the rich; however, netizens are very sensitive to such cases (Cheng, 2006). Cheng (2006) examined the newsworthiness of hot topics on BBS and found that following nationalism articles, the second hottest topic is the sharp class resentment and the widening gap between rich and poor, which is one of the most important topics triggering widespread effects on BBS.

One case he identified is a hit-and-run accident, where a Lincoln car, a symbol of luxury, hit and dragged a little girl for almost 3,000 meters to her death. The incident was largely viewed as a typical case of the rich and powerful trampling on the underprivileged.

A similar incident happened on May 7, 2009, when a University student was run over by a rich second generation official racing with his friends (Sohu.com, 2009). The sole lack of responsibility for others and themselves and lack of respect for people's life are enough to trigger uproar online; the symbol of rich can easily lead to the discussion of the privileges enjoyed by the rich and powerful, and the social inequality that most netizens experience in life. Therefore, this study focuses on two incidents that bring this inequality to light.

Public Uproar in the Li Gang incident

On September 16, 2010, a car accident happened on the campus of Heibei University. After hitting two girls who were crossing the street, the driver did not stop to check the condition of the two victims but moved on to the campus dormitory to pick up his girlfriend. In his way out of the campus, he was intercepted by students and security forces, and the first thing the driver said was, "My father is Li Gang".

The incident rapidly caught the attention of Chinese netizens, and they soon did "human flesh search" (everybody contributed information to hunt down the searched individual), and found the driver's name was Yifan Li and his father was the deputy director of the Public Security Bureau. Due to the power of Li's father, most of the witnesses refused to give interviews, and officials at Heibei University also indicated that students should not participate in activities that might cause trouble for themselves.

However, the platform of Internet provided an alternative way to express the witnesses' anger towards Li and the power play of Li's father. Their posts criticizing Li were widely spread, and netizens around the country have used the derogatory sentence "My father is Li Gang" to justify unethical and abnormal behaviors (for instance, "I

killed a cat. Oh, well, my father is Li Gang”). In the meantime, sentences using the phrase “My father is Li Gang” were shared by a great number of netizens. The reasons behind the strong condemnation from netizens are basically the hatred towards drunk driving, and the arrogance, corruption and misconduct of the second generation of officials.

Later on, the incident evolved into several scandals including the censorship of University and local government, the plagiarism of the president of the University involved, Li Gang’s multiple mansions in rich districts, and so on. Personal information of Li Gang’s son, including his *Renren* page, working place, and personal life, was revealed online.

Online media paid intense attention to the development of the incident. These activities prompted the governor of Heibei province to publicly promise that he would deal with the case with justice and equity. The recent light sentence of three years in prison for Li once again incited uproar among netizens; in the meantime, the netizens also feel helpless in changing the current situation.

The Diaoyu Island Dispute

The Diaoyu Island dispute between China and Japan has lasted for more than a century, and each country tries to establish claim or title over a disputed piece of territory by referring to historical references (discovery), continuous occupation, and effective authority (government) (Chung, 2004, p. 28).

The Diaoyu Island in Chinese or Senkaku in Japanese is part of a tiny group of islands, 6.3 square km in total, in the East China Sea. The islands consists of eight tiny insular formations, of which only two are over 1 km (the Diaoyu Island is the biggest one

with 4.3 square km), five are completely barren, and none are currently inhabited or have had any kind of reported human economic activity.

The seemingly insignificant rocks are of strategic importance in terms of security and economy, as well as their political implications since the Diaoyu Island is located approximately midway between the island of Taiwan and the Japanese Ryukyu Islands, which makes it special to both China and Japan's national defense. The securement of Diaoyu Island to either party will prolong and enlarge its frontier, and put the other party into a disadvantaged position.

The dispute emerged in the early 1970s following a promising prediction of hydrocarbon deposits in the seabed around the island. After the discovery of reserves of natural resources, Japan put boundary markers in Japanese around the island and removed the Chinese boundary markers. Later, in 1972, the United States returned "administrative rights" over the island to Japan following the Okinawa reversion, but refused to take a stance on the sovereignty disputes partly due to the protests among the Chinese people in North America.

Following the first incident that triggered the long-lasting dispute, the break of Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty (PFT) signed in 1978 by Japan put the Diaoyu Island dispute under the spotlight again in 1979. Then in 1990, "the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency (MSA) decided to recognize the lighthouse constructed by the Seinensha in 1978 by including it in the official navigational charts and allowing members of the right-wing group to renovate the lighthouse, which they promptly did". The forth incident happened in 1996 when members of the largest right-wing Japanese nationalist group, the Nihon Seinensha, built a 5-meter-high solar-powered aluminum

lighthouse on one of the smaller disputed islands named Kita Kojima to facilitate the declaration of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Not long after the lighthouse was built, the right-wing group set up the national flag of Japan and a wooden board in memoriam of the deaths in wars.

The recurring dispute over Diaoyu Island is hard to negotiate, and each party tries to establish its legitimacy over it. The Chinese government provided “a mountain of historical evidence to indicate the Diaoyu Island in the East China Sea has been Chinese territory since ancient times.” (*People’s Daily Online*, 2004) They perceive the cession of Diaoyu Island as a result of defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, and according to the Cairo Declaration, it should be reversed to China at the end of the World War II (Chung, 2007). The Japanese government, argues the Diaoyu Island was discovered by Japanese around 1880s, months before the treaty was signed, and claims the island as territory of Japan. After the World War II, the United States took over the Diaoyu Island and reversed it to Japan in 1972. But it is of question whether the island was actually China’s territory instead of “terra nullius.”

Nationalism and Chinese Media

When the Diaoyu dispute recurs, the timing, method, and intensity of the claims by each side are dictated not only by “respective positions on the sovereignty question, but more importantly, by domestic factors not fully within the control of the government” (Chung, 2007, p.53). The domestic factors refer to the rise of nationalism or irredentism and an increasingly confident military in China.

It is extremely easy to trigger Chinese people’s nationalism and hostility towards Japan because the bitter memories from World War II still linger on. To some extent, the

Chinese government argues the taking over the Diaoyu Island and nearby resources represents a “continuing attempt by Japan to keep what it had stolen from Chinese people (Chung, 2007, p. 53).

Nationalism, however, has been evaluated as negative since it increases the chances of international conflict (Downs & Saunders, 1988/89). Three broad themes of nationalism have been identified in the academic studies. First, nationalism can divert attention from state’s inability to meet “societal demands for security, economic development, and effective political institutions.” (Downs & Saunders, 1988/89) Oftentimes, the government blames foreigners for failures of their own and increases international tensions. Second, nationalism serves as a legitimate explanation and search for support by states that have expansionist or militarist goals. Third, competing parties can utilize nationalism to mobilize public support or threaten competitors, thus to gain advantage in domestic political competition.

Nationalism is paramount in the Chinese government’s agenda. The mainstream media, which follow the government’s stance, often use harsh words condemning the “fault” of foreign countries. Li (2009) cited Schell’s conclusions about the general characteristics of nationals, who are sensitive to the issues regarding Chinese collective identity, national insecurity, loss of face, insult and humiliation as foreign arrogance, bullying, lecturing, sense of superiority, and condescension. Due to the past unpleasant history between China and Japan, new dispute between China and Japan would remind Chinese people the past tragic memories and the nationalism can be easily triggered off. Moreover, as Cheng (2006) identified nationalism as the top triggering topic that could generate wide online debate, the recent Diaoyu Island dispute was no exception.

The recent Diaoyu Island disputes originated from a collision of two Japanese naval vessels and a Chinese boat when Japanese vessels tried to intercept the boat on September 7, 2010, around the disputed Diaoyu Island (Johnson, 2010). After the collision, Japanese boarded the boat from China and did inspections on the boat (Johnson, 2010). The next day, the boat's captain was taken for questioning for intrusion of territorial waters of Japan and arrested for the crime of interfering with public affairs.

According to the Chinese official response to the Diaoyu Island incident, the Chinese boat was in China's territorial waters, and Japan's illegal arrest of the Chinese captain was a clear signal to China that the Japanese already see themselves as the owners of the disputed area. Just like before, whenever tension between China and Japan grows, a series of discussion of wrongdoings of Japan will dominate the online public sphericules, which . The incident escalated to a national uproar within few days, and the heated discussion of the incident and related issue with Japan showed up on SNSs, blogs, BBS, and other online platform.

Later, in Xi'an, a large Chinese city, a protest towards Japan took place with many cars made in Japan destroyed. Then, a national boycott of Japanese products was advocated online, and several Japanese brands were listed, and people were advised not to buy the product from the brands on the list. In order to curb the development of the situation, Chinese government made the word: 钓鱼岛 (Diaoyu Island in English), a sensitive word that cannot be publicly searched and published.

When it comes to issues that are highly relevant to nationalist emotions, it is not convenient for the official mainstream media to call for the support of the public explicitly; rather, the online sphericules are perfect to mobilize mass opinions. Anderson

(2005) observed that nationalistic diatribes and rants against Japan are generally allowed by the government to rage unchecked as long as they do not lead to offline protest activity which might spin out of control. Since *People's Daily* stands for governmental stance and should put itself in the light of fairness and objectivity, and *Renren.com* stands for personal stance and should be more liberal in expressing feelings as to Diaoyu Island dispute, it is expected that:

Hypothesis 1: *Renren.com* will be more critical of authority/official figures than *Peopledaily.com* in both cases.

Hypothesis 2: *Renren.com* will mention censorship more than *Peopledaily.com* in both cases.

Hypothesis 3: *Renren.com* will mention media credibility more than *Peopledaily.com* in both cases.

Hypothesis 4: *Renren.com* will hold more perpetrators and officials accountable and will mention their ability solve the issue and find solutions more than *Peopledaily.com* in each case.

Hypothesis 5: *Renren.com* will use more human interest frames and more emotive words and visual information than *Peopledaily.com* in each case.

Hypothesis 6: *Renren.com* will focus more on conflict and will present a more one-sided story than *Peopledaily.com* in each case.

Hypothesis 7: *Renren.com* will mention more wrongdoings of perpetrators and other parties involved in each case than *Peopledaily.com* in each case.

Moreover, the following research questions is formulated:

Research Question 2: What is the dominant theme used on *Renren.com* and *Peopledaily.com* respectively for each case?

Sources

Journalists rely on sources for information (Williams, 1993), perspectives and balance; therefore, sources are integral to news construction (Adam, 2010). Sigal (1987) views that news is “not what journalists think but what their sources say” (p.29), and Gans (1979) argues that “news is information that is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources” (p.80). Similarly Callaghan & Schnell (2011) argues that journalists may “serve as a conduit for the public communiqués of others” (P. 186), disseminate sources’ chosen frames and offering an “acoustical boost for politicians’ messages” (Baker, 1998). Similarly, Entman (2004) argued that news is composed of the “selective, framed communications” of political actors (p.12). Another definition of news is proposed by Bennett (2009) who sees news as “what newsmakers promote as timely, important, or interesting, from which news organizations select, narrate, and package for delivery to people who consume it” (p. 19). Therefore, news is sources’ portrayals of reality mediated by news organizations but journalists’ “construction of reality” (Sigal, 1987, p. 27). To simply put, the news is therefore framed by sources (Molotch & Lester, 1974).

News’ reliance on sources is more prominent in the time of crisis, where uncertainty is ubiquitous, and news sources have the ability to determine how an event is represented to an entire society (Mason, 2007). In his research of the Australian coverage of the Fuji coups in 1987 and 2000, Mason (2007) found that the reporting of the incident

heavily relied on sources from the main institutions in society, particularly government sources and questioned the news reporting as a way to maintain status quo rather than reflecting a reforming reality. This finding is in line with most academic researches and predictions that the sources often cited are representatives of major institutions: government officials, corporate spokespersons, academics, experts and authorities on particular events or subjects, i.e., elite sources rather than the “ignorant mass” as Herman and Chomsky (1994) put it (McChesney, 2002; Herman & Chomsky, 1994). In the meantime, the reliance on elite sources inevitably leads to an acceptance and promotion of “language, agenda and perspective of the political establishment” (Eldridge, 1993, p. 326).

Believing that the media’s values and professional practices determine how news is sourced, Atton (2005) sees there’s a difference of sourcing routine between mainstream media and alternative media, and made the first attempt to examine how alternative media (*SchNEWS* to be specific) select, represent and deploy their news sources. The finding supports his hypothesis that alternative media do give ‘ordinary people’ privileged media access by favoring counter-elite sources just like the mainstream media sourcing elites (Atton, 2005). However, alternative media tend to over access or over represent the anti-elite sources, and thus contradict the journalistic routine of objectivity (Atton, 2005). As such, the last hypothesis predicts the following:

Hypothesis 8: *Renren.com* will cite more non-official sources (like victims and their families, lawyer(s) of the victims, witnesses, scholars) than *Peopledaily.com*.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This thesis aims to determine the framing of the Li Gang incident and the Diaoyu Island dispute in the shared content on SNSs and mainstream media, and to examine the similarities and differences between the frames adopted by each. The Chinese SNS *Renren.com* was selected for its popularity and increasing influence on college students. According to its own website (Life.renren.com, 2011), *Renren* has already reached a user population of 160 million, the majority of whom are college students (Oak Pacific Interactive, 2009), who are politically sensitive and active. As the 17th most visited site in China, it is the largest SNS that is based on real identity, which distinguishes it from the QQ alumni SNS that has the largest number of users (Roven, 2011).

Furthermore, the widely used *Renren.com* functions as an alternative platform for communication of sensitive issues (Jin, 2008). Because *Renren* is a relatively new communication tool, a comparison with more traditional online news website will reveal some of its peculiar characteristics as well as similarities to China's largest newspaper. *Peopledaily.com* was selected as the representative of the traditional media for its authority as the mainstream news outlet and its position as the leading party-line online newspaper in China.

The Sample

To gather data for this study, a content analysis of coverage of two incidents—the Li Gang incident and the Diaoyu Island dispute—on *Renren.com* and *peopledaily.com* was conducted. To determine how the two incidents are framed on *Renren.com* and *peopledaily.com*, the individual online news article or post (in text, video, picture or multimedia format) was considered the unit of analysis.

Since there is no direct search engine for shared content on *Renren*, be it video, picture or article, snowball sampling was conducted by closely reading shared content on the SNS. “Snowball sampling is a chain-referral technique that accumulates data through existing social structures (Bhutta, 2011, p. 3)”, and is common in the researches related with social networks. A similar study investigating the content links on Facebook adopted this sampling technique by taking advantage of researchers’ friend list and analyzing their shared content links (Baresch, Knight, Harp, & Yaschur, 2011). In the study of Facebook’s profile image conducted by Stano (2008), snowball sampling method was used by interviewing random users of Facebook and asking them to forward survey to their friend and acquaintances on Facebook to conduct the research.

In this study, the researcher began with a small sample from her friend list of 612 friends on *Renren*, and then looked into their shared content, selected out the ones that relates to the topics. Then, by identifying the author or the creator of the content, a further look at the author or creator’s sharing center followed, and related content was selected.

For the Li Gang incident, relevant content on *Renren* was identified by looking at content that used words such as “Li Gang”, “hit-and-run incident”, “hit-and –run incident in Hebei University”, and “rich and powerful second generation of officials.” The snowball search produced 105 *Renren* posts. It is worth mentioning that during the search around more than ten posts were found to be censored, and only some titles and previews were available.

As to the peopledaily.com, the keyword “李刚” (Li Gang in English) was searched in the publication’s search engine (<http://s.goso.cn/so?k=&searchlable=0&s=content>) and 394 articles were yielded in the

search result. Since “李刚” is a very common name in China, most of the articles were not really about the Li Gang incident explored here. Meanwhile, *People's Daily's* own search engine provided a list of categories where articles with the keywords were included as shown in Figure 1 where the left sidebar is the list of categories of content. To simplify the search process, a further search was conducted by clicking each category at the side of the search page, and the articles that merely mentioned the words without really reporting on the issue were excluded. Finally, 81 articles covering the “Li Gang hit-and-run incident” were collected and printed out. Lastly, the time frame of the Li Gang hit-and-run incident is from October 16, 2010, the time when the accident happened, to January 9, 2011, the time when the search was conducted.

Figure 1. Screen Capture of *People's Daily* search engine.

人民网 搜索 李刚

人民网主站 报刊 专题 图片 视频 论坛 博客 微博

搜索 按时间排序

新闻全文 新闻标题

搜索结果 约有414项符合 李刚 的查询结果，如下是第 1-20 项(搜索用时0.115)

全部结果

- 时政
- 国际
- 观点
- 经济
- 汽车
- 教育
- 科技
- 社会
- IT
- 环保
- 军事
- 娱乐
- 文化
- 图片
- 中国人大新闻
- 人民电视
- 台湾
- 传媒
- 地方
- 健康
- 体育
- 财经

“李刚”儿子李启铭车祸案开庭

河北大学“10·16”校园车祸案26日在河北省望都县人民法院公开开庭审理。2010年10月16日晚，犯罪嫌疑人李启铭酒后驾驶朋友的迈腾轿车在河北大学新校区生活区，将两名女生撞倒后被保安和学生扣留，警方经对李启铭抽血检测，鉴定为醉酒驾驶，伤者之一陈晓凤因抢救无效死亡。由于犯罪嫌疑人李启铭的父亲系车祸肇事地点...辩论，公诉人望都县人民检察院以交通肇事罪起诉犯罪嫌疑人李启铭，列举了相关证据，李启铭当庭认罪，对犯罪事实供认不讳。庭审从上午9时开始，10时40分结束，审判长...

<http://zl.people.com.cn/GB/186935/13832830.html> 2011-1-27 16:50

“我爸是李刚”主角当庭认罪 因其身份异地审理

日晚，犯罪嫌疑人李启铭酒后驾驶朋友的迈腾轿车在河北大学新校区生活区，将两名女生撞倒后被保安和学生扣留，警方经对李启铭抽血检测，鉴定为醉酒驾驶，伤者之一陈晓凤因抢救无效死亡。由于犯罪嫌疑人李启铭的父亲系车祸肇事地点所在的保定市公安局北市分局副局长，此案采取异地审判的方式，保定市政法部门指定望都县政法部门管辖。在...庭审现场，公诉人和辩护人都充分表达了各自意见，并进行了辩论，公诉人望都县人民检察院以交通肇事罪起诉犯罪嫌疑人李启铭，列举了相关证据，李启铭当庭认罪，对犯罪事实...

<http://society.people.com.cn/GB/13828476.html> 2011-1-27 09:33

必须彻底推开“李刚门”

受到广泛关注的“李启铭撞死河北大学学生陈晓凤”案将于1月26日在河北省望都县人民法院开庭，这意味着从法律上终结扰扰的“李刚门”已经为期不远...。相对于扑朔迷离的费云会案，导致陈晓凤死亡的交通肇事细节基本是清晰的。另外据媒体报道，遇难者陈晓凤的父亲不仅与犯罪嫌疑人李启铭的父亲李刚达成了“赔偿协议”，还签署了...一个符合法律规定的公正结果。但是，公众之所以持续关注“李刚门”事件，并非仅仅想了解法院对李启铭的最终判决结果，他们更想知道与判决结果相关的所有程序是否公正，比如陈...

<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/209043/212786/13828346.html> 2011-1-27 09:29

For the Diaoyu Island dispute, related content on *Renren* was identified with the same snowball technique. Since the Diaoyu Island dispute is a recurring incident, previous reports of this issue existed. To make the dataset relevant to the recent arrest of a Chinese captain by the Japanese government in September 6, 2010, the search was limited to the time period from September 7, 2010, to January 9, 2011 (the day when the search was conducted). The search yielded 114 *Renren* posts that mentioned words such as “Diaoyu Island”, “our territory”, “Japanese”, and “Japan.”. As in the previous case, 13 posts that were censored were found and added to the censored dataset and the sample is not exhaustive.

The content on *peopledaily.com* regarding the Li Gang incident was searched by the author herself. However, “Diaoyu Island” (钓鱼岛 in Chinese) content can not be searched directly from <http://s.goso.cn/so?k=&searchlable=0&s=content from abroad> (due to the Great Firewall of China, which filters content perceived by the government as controversial). Therefore, the search was completed by a friend who’s studying journalism in Renmin University in China following the researcher’s guidelines. By searching “钓鱼岛” (Diaoyu Island in Chinese), 1,075 articles showed up in the results. Then, just as in the search technique used for the Li Gang incident on *People’s Daily* website, the researcher’s friend looked into each category and selected and saved the relevant ones published between September 6, 2010, and January 9, 2011. The researcher double checked the content and assigned each article an ID. The final dataset has 130 articles.

Conceptual and Operational Definition of Variables

A frame is the central organizing theme in the news story. In this study, text, picture, video and other multimedia content will be examined for framing devices. Manifest variables include (2) control number, (3) date of publication, (4) title of the content, (5) source, (6) type of the story, and (7) time being shared (only for content from *Renren.com*). In addition, two more general questions aim to identify the (8) dominant themes and the (9) superficiality of the material.

With some differences in wording that reflect the nature of the two incidents, the second part of the codebook identifies the tone of the content. Tone refers to the attitude of the stories toward each side. The tone towards one side can be positive, negative and neutral (Barnes et al., 2008). A story demonstrates a positive tone toward one side if it expressed sympathy and indicates support for this side. A story shows a negative tone towards one side if it reveals critical tendency or assigns blame to this side. A story exhibits a neutral tone when it only plainly states the facts or when it shows no demonstrable attitude toward either side. For the Li Gang incident, the tone towards Li Gang and his son, the victims, government, the University, and spectators are examined. As to Diaoyu Island, the tone towards China and Chinese government and Japan and Japanese government are examined respectively.

The third section of the codebook was designed to identify 4 generic frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, and morality, with each measured by one or more questions. *Frames* refer to the overarching frameworks journalists use to structure a story. The textual frames will be ascertained by analyzing the complete article asking three to five specific questions for each frame. The five generic frames and most

of the measurements were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study with slight changes to measure the two cases.

The *responsibility* frame focuses on party/individual who should be responsible for the issue. The *human interest* frame focuses on the individual story. The *conflict* frames emphasize the discrepancy between people or organizations. The *morality* frame focuses on the culture, and social norms. Issue-specific frames are measured together by the dominant theme, the responsible party and capable party in the *responsibility* frame, wrongdoing of some party in the *morality* frame and tone towards each party.

Furthermore, the sources that are mentioned or cited in the material were coded. *Sources* refer to persons, agencies or organizations cited in the story to provide background information, pertinent facts and data, and interpretation of events, and were coded by selecting the provided choices. Additional questions regarding censorship and credibility of the mainstream media were included.

The coding instructions for the Li Gang incident and the Diaoyu Island dispute are outlined in the Appendix I and Appendix II respectively.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability refers to "levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument" (Wimmer and Dominik, 2006, p. 166). The two independent coders are both journalism graduate students from China since the coding content is mostly in Chinese. After two training sessions, intercoder reliability calculated for 10% of the dataset was computed using Cohen's kappa (Wimmer and Dominik, 2006, p. 168). For the nominal variables, coefficients

ranged from .77 to 1; for interval data, Pearson Correlation coefficients ranged from .85 to 1 as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Sharing and Reading on *Renren*

Research question 1 was designed to investigate what variables predict post popularity on *Renren*. Four ANOVA models were estimated with times being shared and read as dependent variables and type of stories, superficiality, and use of emotion-laden words and images as independent variables. The tests results in Table 3 revealed that there's a significant difference in the times the stories are read and shared between different types of post formats, and more interactive formats are more popular than plain format ($F_{\text{share}}=7.42$, $p<.01$, $df=1$; $F_{\text{read}}=20.93$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). However, no significant difference was reported in Table 4 between times being shared or read in relation to whether the story was treated superficially or in-depth ($F_{\text{share}}=0.47$, $p=0.49$, $df=1$; $F_{\text{read}}=0.01$, $p=0.94$, $df=1$).

Furthermore, four t-tests were conducted with use of emotion-laden words and emotion stirring visual information as grouping variables and times being shared and read as test variables. T-tests results in Table 5 revealed that use of emotion-laden adjectives ($t_{\text{share}}=2.34$, $p<.01$; $t_{\text{read}}=2.34$, $p<.01$) and visual images ($t_{\text{share}}=-1.98$, $p<.01$; $t_{\text{read}}=-2.68$, $p<.01$) do make a difference in times a story being shared and read, and evidently, the ones that used such words ($M_{\text{share}}=9957$, $M_{\text{read}}=65570$) or images ($M_{\text{share}}=8925$, $M_{\text{read}}=25066$) were more popular than the ones that didn't use such words ($M_{\text{share}}=1277$, $M_{\text{read}}=5626$) or visual information ($M_{\text{share}}=4061$, $M_{\text{read}}=72470$).

Differences in Tone

Hypothesis 1 predicted more critical coverage of stories from *Renren*. On a 3-point tone scale, where 1=positive, 2=neutral, and 3=negative, t-tests (Table 6) found that

in the Li Gang incident stories, the tone towards Li Gang and his son is generally similar and quite negative on the two platforms, with no significant differences ($M_{Renren} = 2.58$; $M_{Daily} = 2.47$; $t = 1.43$, $p = 0.16$). On the other hand, the tone toward victims differed significantly between the two platforms, with *People's Daily* stories being more negative to neutral ($M = 1.83$) and *Renren's* reportage tending to be more sympathetic and supportive of victims ($M = 1.71$). The t-test showed that there's a significant difference between the tone toward victim between the two websites ($t = -1.58$, $p < .01$).

In the Diaoyu Island stories, the tone toward Japan was generally negative (Table 6), but it was more negative on *Renren* ($M = 2.68$) than on *People's Daily* ($M = 2.44$). The difference in tone towards Japan is statistically significant between the two platforms ($t = 3.81$, $p < 0.01$). When it comes to tone towards China, the tone tends to be between neutral to negative on *Renren* ($M = 2.1$) and positive to neutral on *People's Daily* ($M = 1.98$). The T-test indicates that there's a significant difference of the tones towards China in reporting the Diaoyu Island dispute between the two websites ($t = 2.26$, $p < .01$). Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported.

Censorship and Credibility

The second hypothesis predicted that *Renren* would mention censorship more than *People's Daily* online. To investigate this, descriptive analysis and crosstabs were conducted as shown in Table 7. In the Li Gang case, 41.9% of stories from *Renren.com* and 35.8% of stories from *People's Daily Online* mentioned censorship, but the difference between the framing of censorship between the two is not statistically significant ($p = 0.40$). Meanwhile, in the Diaoyu Case, 21.3% of stories from *Renren.com* and 0 stories from *People's Daily Online* mentioned censorship, and crosstabs ($X^2 = 24.84$,

$df=1$, $p<.05$) indicate a significant difference in reporting censorship between the two online media outlets. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is partially supported.

Looking further into each case (Table 8), 77% of the censorship in Li Gang's stories mostly focused on the censorship from the University and local government, while 90% of the censorship in the Diaoyu stories focused on censorship in the media or somewhere else rather than from government. Therefore, it is questionable whether people are more critical of domestic news or have heavier dependency or trust in media or government when it comes to international news, or it is a random occurrence.

The third hypothesis predicted that *Renren* would mention or question the credibility of media more than *People's Daily*. To investigate this, descriptive analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table 9. In the Li Gang case, 13.3% of stories from *Renren.com* and 9.9% of stories from *People's Daily Online* mentioned censorship ($X^2=0.52$, $p=.47$, $df=1$). However, in the Diaoyu Island case, none of the stories from both media outlets mentioned media credibility. Therefore, the third hypothesis is not supported.

Dominant Theme

To examine the dominant theme used on *Renren* and *People's Daily Online* as proposed in research question 2, a frequency test and crosstabs were conducted and the results are shown in Table 10. In the Li Gang case, both *Renren* (55%) and *People's Daily Online* (56%) heavily adopted the official power play towards the powerless mass. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the dominant theme in both media outlets was power play between Li Gang and powerless mass. Crosstabs revealed that the difference between the themes used by *Renren* and *People's Daily Online* approached significance

at $p < 0.1$ level ($X^2 = 6.97$, $p < .1$, $df = 3$). When it comes to each specific theme, stories from *Renren* and *People's Daily* were different in adopting hit-and-run as dominant theme at $p < 0.1$ level ($X^2 = 2.77$, $p < .1$, $df = 1$), and also differed in focusing on censorship at $p < .05$ level ($X^2 = 4.37$, $p < .05$, $df = 1$).

In the coverage of the Diaoyu Island dispute, 75% stories on *Renren* adopted the theme of territorial dispute of the Diaoyu Island. On the other hand, only 57% stories on *People's Daily Online* adopted the theme of territorial dispute (Table 10). Crosstabs revealed that stories on *Renren* were significantly more heavily focused on Diaoyu Island dispute than *People's Daily*. Few stories (6%) on *Renren* focused on historical feud, and no story from *Renren* mentioned historical records and literature on Diaoyu Island, while no story on *People's Daily* mentioned historical feud, but a few stories (10%) focused on historical records and literature proving Diaoyu Island's identity. Crosstabs revealed that stories from *Renren* and *People's Daily* were significantly different in adopting historical issues ($X^2 = 8.22$, $p < .01$, $df = 1$) and records and literature about Diaoyu Island ($X^2 = 12.04$, $p < .01$, $df = 1$). The rest of the stories focused on other themes, and crosstabs showed that there was a difference between other themes used by *Renren* and *People's Daily Online* ($X^2 = 8.49$, $p < .05$, $df = 1$).

Framing Differences

Hypotheses 4 to 7 were designed to explore the frames used by the two websites regarding the two cases.

In the Li Gang case (Table 11), 48% of the stories on *Renren* and 28% of the stories on *People's Daily* did not suggest the party who should be responsible for the issue in the context, while 44% of stories on *Renren* and 65% of stories on *People's*

Daily indicated that Li Gang and his son should be responsible for the issue. Other parties, such as victims, government, witnesses, netizens, students, university, police and others, were only occasionally or not at all mentioned as the parties responsible.

Furthermore, crosstabs revealed that there is a significant difference between stories from *Renren* and *People's Daily* in reporting the responsible party ($X^2= 12.59$, $p<.05$, $df=5$). However, most of the stories on *Renren* (82%) and *People's Daily* (85%) did not really suggest the party who has the ability to solve the problem or issue in context. Few stories on *Renren* tended to suggest that Li Gang and his son (7%), police (3%) and other parties (6%) have the ability to solve the problem or issue in context. However, stories on *People's Daily* mostly suggested government (6%) have the ability to solve the problem, followed by Li Gang (5%), students (1%), and police (1%). Moreover, crosstabs showed that stories on *Renren* and *People's Daily* were significantly different in pointing the party able to solve the problem or issue in context ($X^2= 11.64$, $p<.05$, $df=5$).

As to solutions frame, most stories from *Renren* (84%) and *People's Daily* (85%) didn't suggest solutions to the problem or issue in the context, and there's no significant difference between the two websites in framing solutions ($X^2= 0.07$, $p=0.80$, $df=1$).

Therefore, hypothesis 4 is partially supported in the Li Gang incident.

Most stories from *Renren* (91%) and *People's Daily* (96%) used human interest/personal angles, and there is no significant difference between the two websites ($X^2= 1.80$, $p=0.18$, $df=1$) according to the crosstab results shown in Table 12. Then, most stories on *Renren* (70%) employed emotional-laden adjectives and harsh words that generate feelings of outrage, sympathy or compassion, while fewer than half of the

stories (47%) from *People's Daily* employed such words. Crosstabs showed a significant difference in the two websites' usage of emotional laden words ($X^2= 9.71$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Similarly, 35% stories on *Renren* and only 6.2% stories on *People's Daily* used visual information that generates feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion, and chi-square tests (Table 12) showed that that *Renren* (35%) used significantly more visual information than *People's Daily* (6%; $X^2= 22.10$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 is partially supported; and no difference was found between *Renren* and *People's Daily* in stories using the human interest frame, however, *Renren* did use more emotive words and visual information in the Li Gang incident.

Chi-squares in Table 13 show that stories on both *Renren* (86%) and *People's Daily* (86%) mentioned disagreement or conflict with no significant differences ($X^2= 0.02$, $p=0.89$, $df=1$). However, most stories on *People's Daily* (14%) than on *Renren* (6%) presented two or more than two sides' opinions, and crosstabs revealed that the difference is not statistically significant ($X^2= 3.41$, $p=.07$, $df=1$). Lastly, most of the stories from both websites did not mention winners or losers, and no significant difference was detected by crosstabs ($X^2= 1.29$, $p=0.72$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 6 is partially supported; *Renren* seemed to shift more to one side, but the difference was not significant compared with *People's Daily* in the Li Gang incident.

As to morality frames, chi-square results are shown in Table 14. Most stories on *Renren* (61%) and *People's Daily* (88%) mentioned wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son. Crosstabs showed that there is a difference in mentioning wrongdoing of Li Gang and his son between the two websites ($X^2= 16.38$, $p<.01$, $df=1$), and *People's Daily* mentioned more wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son than *Renren*. Meanwhile, stories on *Renren*

(54%) mentioned wrongdoings of other parties more than ones on *People's Daily* (38%), and there is a significant difference in the two websites ($X^2=4.70$, $p<.05$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is partially supported; *Renren* mentions more wrongdoings of other parties, but less wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son than *People's Daily*.

In the Diaoyu Island case, 33% of stories on *Renren* and 49% of stories on *People's Daily* did not suggest the party who should be responsible for the issue in the context, while 56% stories on *Renren* and 43% stories on *People's Daily* indicated that Japan should be responsible for the issue (Table 15). Chi-Squares results in Table 15 revealed that the difference is statistically significant ($X^2= 11.85$, $p<0.01$, $df=3$). Some stories (6%) on *Renren* positioned China as the responsible party, while only 1% stories on *People's Daily* presented China as the responsible party. Lastly, 5% of stories on *Renren* and 7% of stories on *People's Daily* held that other parties should be responsible for the issue.

However, 63.2% of stories on *Renren* and 95% of stories on *People's Daily* did not really suggest the party who has the ability to solve the problem or issue in context (Table 15). A few stories on *Renren* tended to suggest that Japan (17%), China (19%), and other parties (1%) have the ability to solve the problem or issue in context. It is worth mentioning that *Renren* had more stories showing that China had the ability to solve the issue than stories presenting Japan in a similar way. Within the few stories mentioning ability to solve the problem, *People's Daily* mostly suggested Japan (3%) has the ability to solve the problem, followed by Other (2%). None of the Daily stories suggested that China could solve the problem. Crosstabs showed that stories on *Renren* and *People's*

Daily were significantly different in framing the ability to solve the problem or issue in context ($X^2= 45.06$, $p<.01$, $df=3$).

Lastly, significantly more stories on *Renren* (39%) than on *People's Daily* (9%) suggested solutions to the problem ($X^2= 29.62$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported in the Diaoyu Island dispute.

Most stories from *Renren* (90%) and *People's Daily* (85%) went into personal life, and there is no significant difference between the two websites ($X^2= 1.26$, $p=0.262$, $df=1$) as displayed in Table 16. Then, most stories on *Renren* (57%) employed emotional laden adjectives and harsh words that generate feelings of outrage, sympathy or compassion, while fewer stories (20%) from *People's Daily* employed such words. Crosstabs showed a significant difference in the two websites' usage of emotional laden words ($X^2= 34.08$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Similarly, 14% stories on *Renren* and no story on *People's Daily* used visual information that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion, and chi-square tests showed that there is a significant difference in the way that *Renren* and *People's Daily* adopting such visual images ($X^2= 19.53$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 is partially supported and no difference was detected on use of human interest between the two websites.

Most stories on *Renren* (95%) than on *People's Daily* (70%) mentioned disagreement or conflict, and chi-square tests in Table 17 showed that there is a difference between the two websites in mentioning conflicts ($X^2= 24.71$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Then, 36.8% of stories on *Renren* and 37% on *People's Daily* presented two or more than two sides' opinions, and crosstabs revealed that there is no difference in the two websites ($X^2= 0.00$, $p=0.99$, $df=1$). Lastly, most of the stories from *Renren* and no story from

People's Daily mentioned winners or losers ($X^2=5.82$, $p<.05$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 6 is partially supported and no difference was found in the mentioning of two or more sides of the issue in the context.

As to morality frames, 69% of stories from *Renren* and 49% from *People's Daily* mentioned wrongdoings of Japan as reflected in Table 18. Crosstabs showed that there is a difference in mentioning wrongdoing of Japan ($X^2= 10.84$, $p<0.01$, $df=1$). Meanwhile, stories on *Renren* (54%) mentioned wrongdoings of other parties more than on *People's Daily* (15%), and there is a significant difference in the two websites ($X^2=10.93$, $p<.01$, $df=1$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is supported.

Sources

Hypothesis 8 predicted that *Renren* will cite fewer official sources per story than *People's Daily Online*. In the Li Gang case, the descriptive statistics (Table 19) show that *Renren* cited sources 452 times: victims (1.00, 24.1%, that is x victims per story), lawyer (0.30, 7.1%), Li Gang (0.29, 6.6%), witnesses (0.23, 5.3%), students (0.33, 7.7%), police (0.17, 4%), university officials (0.18, 4.2%), government officials (0.10, 2.2%), scholars (0.14, 3.3%), and others (1.52, 35.4%), while *People's Daily Online* cited sources 250 times: victims (3.10, 13.2%), lawyer (0.40, 4.4%), Li Gang (0.10, 12.8%), witnesses (0.09, 2.8%), students (0.12, 4.0%), police (0.44, 14.4%), university officials (0.05, 1.6%), government officials (0.19, 6.0%), scholars (0.05, 6.0%), and others (1.21, 39.2%). Independent sample T-tests ($t=2.02$, $p<.05$, $df=184$) revealed that *Renren* cited significantly more victims (1.00, 24.1%) than *People's Daily Online* (0.40, 13.2%). In addition, police sources were cited more on *People's Daily Online* (0.44, 14.4%) than on *Renren* (0.17, 4.0%; $t=-2.86$, $p<.01$, $df=184$). Students were cited more on *Renren* at .10

level. No significant differences were found on other sources between the two websites. However, it is worth noting that 30% stories on *Renren* and 19% stories on *People's Daily* didn't cite any source. While this may be expected on a social networking site, it is surprising for a mainstream news medium abiding to attribution standards. In fact, an average post on *Renren* cited 4.3 sources on average, while *People's Daily* only cited 3.1 per story.

In the Diaoyu Island case, the descriptive statistics (Table 20) show that *Renren* cited sources 319 times (2.79 times per story): China (0.82, 29.2%), Japan (0.61, 21.9%), scholars (0.34, 12.2%), public (0.06, 2.2%), and other (0.96, 34.5%), while *People's Daily Online* cited sources 580 times: China (0.97, 21.7%), Japan (0.68, 15.2%), scholars (1.71, 38.3%), public (0.01, 0.17%), and other (1.10, 24.7%). Independent sample T-tests revealed that *Renren* cited significantly fewer scholars than *People's Daily Online* ($t=-4.18$, $p<0.01$, $df=242$). In addition, average citizens were cited more on *Renren* (0.06, 2.2%) than on *People's Daily Online* (0.01, 0.17%; $t=-2.37$, $p<.05$, $df=242$). No significant differences were found on other sources between the two websites. Therefore, the hypothesis is not supported. However, it is worth noting that 30% stories on *Renren* and 2% stories on *People's Daily* did not cite any source.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary, Significance, and Justifications of Results

The purpose of this study is to explore the framing differences between the largest Chinese SNS, *Renren*, and the online version of the leading party paper, *People's Daily Online*. Two cases were selected to test the differences, the Li Gang incident as domestic news, and the Diaoyu Island dispute as international news. Besides testing the differences in framing used by publics and official media, the study also examined sourcing and the factors that affect the number of times a story on *Renren* is shared and read.

Sharing and Reading on *Renren*

The study found that stories with certain characteristics are shared and read more than others. Among the four types of stories analyzed, stories in the format of text had the lowest mean number of being shared and read, followed by multimedia, which is a mix of text with picture or video. The stories in the format of picture or video only were far more shared and read than the stories with any text involved. It can be inferred that, as Plato's fifth corollary states, images and pictures hit the heart and cloud the mind. As "veridicality and verisimilitude of those images are rarely doubted" (Perlmutter, 1998, p.4), the feelings a picture or image is said to incite are taken as distinct, uniform, and transcendental, that is to say, if people do have emotional response, the kind of emotional response is assumed to be the same regardless of the observer (Perlmutter, 1998). As such, these formats, especially images or videos with emotion-laden visual information, are more likely to generate strong and similar response from audiences, and thus become more popular and widely disseminate information on SNSs. Furthermore, watching videos and looking at pictures require less effort as reading a long text, and in the

meantime, videos and pictures are as effective in communicating the key information to the viewers. Furthermore, some texts focused on complex explanation of an event, which might lose readers because of the cognitive efforts required by the text to understand its meanings.

Superficiality did not really make a difference in shares and reads. Whether the story is treated superficially, i.e. simply copying and pasting other people's content or importing from other websites, or in-depth, with well-thought ideas and self-created message, did not really have an effect on the times the story is shared and read. As a matter of fact, during the coding process, the most widely shared videos were found to be the ones from other popular video-sharing websites, such as youku.com, ku6.com, and 56.com, and the videos were made by the netizens instead of official TV clips. In the future, such cases could be further coded as produced or written by professionals or netizens, and also specify the easiness to understand the message. In this way, it can be discerned whether *Renren* is profuse with content originated from netizens.

Interestingly enough, on *Renren*, the use of emotion-laden words and visual information made a significant difference on people's behavior of sharing and reading. The stories using such words like "merciless", "heartless", "rampant", "bully", and "piss off" to express strong and intense feeling towards a certain party or parties are viewed and shared by the SNS users as a legitimate outpouring of their own feelings, and therefore, stories containing such words are shared and read more. Similarly, the ones with emotion stirring visual information, be it picture or video or multimedia, are far more shared and read by *Renren* users than the ones that do not contain such visual information.

***Renren*'s Tone Being More Critical**

Several cues from the results tend to point to one direction, that is *Renren*, as a social networking site, appeals more to emotion. For example, the use of emotion-laden words and visual images is related with more shares, and the tone *Renren* used is either very positive towards some party such as the victim in the Li Gang incident or very negative towards some party such as Li Gang in the Li Gang incident, Chinese and Japanese government in the Diaoyu Island dispute. It is understandable, since *Renren* can perform as a medium to transmit news (Deuze, 2003), and it can also function as a personal outlet to express netizens' own judgments, feelings, and other personal views. Therefore, compared with *People's Daily*, which is a professional mainstream media outlet, *Renren* is more aggressive, critical and lacking in journalistic control. However, this lack of journalistic control and professional guidance enables *Renren* as a place free from self-censorship, which is profound in China's news agencies.

It is worth mentioning the tone towards China. On *Renren*, the Chinese government was blamed because it took no real action during the dispute except criticizing the Japanese government every time in press conference. Naturally, it is not the case on *People's Daily*, a party paper which is not supposed to contradict with the official stance on such big international issues.

Censorship and Credibility

The second hypothesis predicted differences in mentioning censorship between the two media outlets. In the Li Gang case, no difference was detected. The possible reason is that after the hit-and-run incident happened, the university itself was reported to have censored students, and the local government also tried to censor the journalists from

reporting the case. Therefore, most censorship, which happened in the local government and university, was reported in both outlets to truly reflect the development of the incident abiding to the journalistic ethical value of adhering to the truth.

However, a significant difference in reporting censorship was found in the Diaoyu Island case, and most of the censorship mentioned referred to the government's censorship regarding the sensitive issue. In the Diaoyu Island case, in order to control the development of the recent Diaoyu Island dispute, the Chinese government censored the use of the word 钓鱼岛 (Diaoyu Island in English) and, for a while, made it a sensitive word shortly after a drastic protest happened in Xi'an province with many Made in Japan cars destroyed (China Daily, 2010). This again confirms that the government allows certain amount of online debates of nationalism, but not to the extent that it will create real action, or other violent and extremist activities. On *Renren*, people were more critical of the media's obvious efforts to cater to the party's ideologies and guidelines, and most censorship mentioned on *Renren* actually referred to this kind of censorship. However, being a leading party paper, *People's Daily* is not likely to point out the media's censorship. So it makes sense that *Renren* mentioned more censorship regarding the Diaoyu Island dispute.

This finding that *People's Daily* did not discuss censorship in the Diaoyu Island case, in turn, reveals that *People's Daily* online, as most national media outlets, is not critical of the government policies in international matters such as the Diaoyu Island issue, but tends to give a more comprehensive coverage of domestic issues.

As to mentioning the credibility of the mainstream media, it was only found in the Li Gang case. After the hit-and-run incident, CCTV spared five minutes in the national

TV news program to Li Gang and his son to apologize to the victims, and this triggered a wide debate about media's credibility, objectivity and their roles as the mouthpiece of the government. Mostly, the mainstream media being questioned is represented by CCTV. In the Diaoyu Island dispute, none of the two outlets mentioned credibility of media. For *Renren*, the reason might be that the information from the media is congruent with most *Renren* users' knowledge, and they do not think the media are not credible in this case. Another reason might be that for international news, people do not have as many sources and direct contact as for the domestic ones, therefore, it is hard to find incongruent messages that contradict or refute the mainstream media's news.

The fact that *People's Daily* did question the credibility of media in the Li Gang case, but not in the Diaoyu Island's case, again, confirmed the corollary that *People's Daily* presents a more comprehensive coverage of domestic issues compared with international news.

Dominant Theme

In the Li Gang case, stories from both outlets largely adopted power play between the powerful official and powerless mass as the dominant theme. Interestingly, no differences were found between *Renren* and *People's Daily* mentioning censorship; however, there is a difference between censorship as a dominant theme. While on *Renren* 12% stories focused on censorship, *People's Daily* only had 4% stories focused on censorship. It seems that *Renren* was more aversive and sensitive towards censorship, while *People's Daily* tended to downplay censorship.

Not surprisingly, only a few stories from the two outlets presented the case as a hit-and-run incident, and the power play between the powerful official and powerless

mass overshadowed all other themes. Looking back on all hit-and-run incidents that generated huge uproar online, most of them were related with rich or powerful negligent drunk drivers with disregard and disrespect for human life, such as the Hu Jia case (Sohu.com, 2009) in 2009 in which a university student was killed by Hu Jia, a young man from an affluent family (富二代 in Chinese, rich second generation). Therefore, it makes sense to conclude that it is the aversion toward the rich and powerful peoples' malfeasance rather than the sole hit-and-run.

In the Diaoyu Island dispute, most stories on both *Renren* and *People's Daily* focused on the dispute, however, *Renren* more heavily focused on Diaoyu Dispute than *People's Daily*. *People's Daily* had a wider topic range from each country's military strategies to protect Diaoyu Island and other countries' intervention about this issue, while *Renren*'s range was narrower. The results also showed that few stories (6%) on *Renren* focused on the historical controversies between China and Japan, especially in WWII, while no story on *People's Daily* mentioned this topic. Instead, *People's Daily* focused more on historical records and literature about Diaoyu Island to prove its identity. This is also consistent with the presumption that *People's Daily*, as a party paper, provided academic research to prove its standing, however, on *Renren*, the platform was used as a place to express people's own feelings.

Frames

In the Li Gang case, most stories from both *Renren* and *People's Daily* indicated that Li Gang and his son should be responsible for the issue; however, more stories from *People's Daily* specified the party who should be responsible compared with stories on *Renren*.

Most stories from both outlets did not point out who has the ability to alleviate the problem, but among those stories specifying the capable party, stories from *Renren* believed that Li Gang should have the ability to alleviate the problem, while *People's Daily* criticized and blamed the government more than stories from *Renren*, which is surprising, but also makes sense because, unlike users on SNSs, *People's Daily* treated the incident as a societal problem.

Since the Li Gang incident evolved around a hit-and-run incident, most of the stories on both outlets went into personal life of people. However, *Renren* used more emotion laden words and visual information to generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion. In such way, *Renren* appealed to human emotion more than *People's Daily* did.

Conflict was roughly equally reported by the two outlets, and most stories on both outlets only cited one side involved in the conflict. Even so, *Renren* seemed to lean more to one side, and presented a more single-sided story compared with *People's Daily*. Atton (2005) questioned that alternative media tend to overly represent a side, while neglect the opposite side. This might be the case here, but since the code sheet did not specify which party is represented, it is hard to infer that this is the case.

As to the morality frame, stories from *People's Daily* mentioned the wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son more than stories from *Renren*, and *Renren* mentioned more wrongdoings of other parties than *People's Daily*, such as School and government officials, witnesses, and students from Hebei University. One possibility is that a story from *Renren*, being shorter and not abiding to journalistic norms, tended to focus on fewer issues than *People's Daily* in a story, lacked consistency, and did not refer to or

clearly mentioned prior developments. As such, the stories from *Renren* read like a stream of consciousness.

In the Diaoyu Island case, most stories on *Renren* and *People's Daily* indicated that Japan should be responsible for the issue, however, dramatically fewer stories on *People's Daily* presented that China should be responsible for the issue compared with *Renren*. Again, this confirms the corollary that *Renren* is more critical of the government. When it comes to mentioning the ability to alleviate or solve the problem, more stories on *Renren* indicated that China has the ability to alleviate the problem than Japan. However, most stories (95.4%) from *People's Daily* did not mention the party who has the ability to solve the issue. It is worth noting that most solutions from *Renren* stories are based on impulsive reactions and shallow knowledge and strong emotion rather than professional and scholarly analysis. This is the case for the solution part, and most of the solutions on *Renren* were presented in a very simple style.

Like in the Li Gang case, no difference was found between the two media outlets' use of personal stories. However, more stories from *Renren* used emotion-laden words and visual information to appeal to human emotion and arouse resonance among netizens.

As to the use of conflict frames, more stories on *Renren* (95%) focused on conflicts compared to *People's Daily* (70%). Conflict is a news value that is bound to attract audiences' attention. *People's Daily* is a conservative medium that shows the stance of the government, which did not really revolve around conflicts. In this case, they provided historical proofs, military strategies instead of pure conflict around Diaoyu Island. Interestingly, some stories on *Renren* were titled "China was totally defeated in this dispute", and they cited some unknown scholars to analyze the whole situation, and

to give more insights into the strategies used by each country, and reached the conclusion that one side was winning while one side was losing the ground. However, such viewpoints never appeared on *People's Daily*.

Stories on *Renren* mentioned more wrongdoings of Japan and other parties than stories on *People's Daily*. Among the wrongdoings of other parties, some of them were referring to wrongdoings of China in being soft throughout history.

Sources

Atton (2005) predicted that alternative media give 'ordinary people' privileged media access by favoring counter-elite sources while mainstream media cite more elite sources. However, this hypothesis is only partially supported in both cases. In Li Gang's case, *Renren* cited more victims (at $p < .05$ level) and students (at $p < .1$ level) than *People's Daily*, while *People's Daily* cited more police sources. In the Diaoyu Island dispute, *Renren* cited more average citizens as sources and *People's Daily* cited more scholars as sources. In sum, *People's Daily* used more scholarly sources, but fewer ordinary people sources, while *Renren* used more ordinary people, especially the powerless victims as sources. Also, surprisingly, *Renren* cited more sources overall per post than *People's Daily*, a trend not met in the international affairs case. Average citizens' proximity to sources directly involved in the Li Gang incident might explain this.

Generally, stories on *Renren* were more critical and more extreme in tone towards every side, and also appealed to emotional sphere of human perception. Several framing differences were found, and those differences were mostly caused by journalistic standards on *People's Daily*, personal outpouring of ideas on *Renren*, self-censorship,

and other reasons. Furthermore, *Renren* openly and directly confronted the mainstream media's censorship and credibility.

Limitations and Future Research

Since the stories from *Renren* are convenient snowball samples instead of all the stories regarding the two cases, it may be that the frames captured in the study used are not exhaustive and comprehensive. However, without an official search engine that can search the shared articles on *Renren*, it is not possible to achieve a full sample. And close to 100 is a pretty solid sample size that one can draw general conclusions from.

Secondly, some stories were censored or deleted with only the title left, and the researcher of this study could not access and collect them after the fact. In addition, videos on *Renren* can not be downloaded, and some videos, which were selected into the sample at the very beginning, were no longer accessible when coding. Therefore, there are missing data due to censorship and probably some inadvertent removing or deleting by netizens who published them.

Although the study used two cases to prevent the risk that a single incident would be too case specific to draw any generalization, the overall dearth of scholarly research on comparison of contents on SNSs and mainstream media still pose threat to the conclusions.

During the selection of the sample, several popular authors whose posts were shared by lots of people were found, and they consistently paid attention to the development of an issue or several hot social problems. In the future, it would be interesting to interview these authors, and to gauge their understandings of SNSs and to look into the motivations for creating and sharing content on SNSs.

It is also significant to survey the SNSs users about their habits of getting news from SNSs, and the perceived credibility of the messages on SNSs. As detected in the study, several stories questioned mainstream media's credibility in the two cases, and the distrust of mainstream media may alter their way of getting news, and Web 2.0, or even Web 3.0, would fill the hole as information source. In the meantime, it is also crucial to test the credibility of information online. If no quality and trustworthy information can be retrieved online, new communication technologies would become propaganda tools of false messages.

Furthermore, since many stories on *Renren* were aware of censorship, and tried to get around it, it is of interest to test the techniques used by netizens to get around censorship and to circulate politically sensitive information in the new information environment.

Conclusion

Overall, this study gives users of social media even in authoritarian regimes hope that they may find alternative voices to mainstream media. People on *Renren* posted politically sensitive information that was addressed differently by the mainstream media, and the posts were widely shared and read by *Renren* users. Although self-censorship may still exist, *Renren* users openly and overtly question censorship and credibility of the media while managing to dodge censorship attempts. Generally, stories posted on *Renren* are more critical towards the officials and government and more positive towards powerless victims. Furthermore, stories on *Renren* appeal to emotion by using emotion-laden words and visual information, which tend to create strong and uniform emotions towards certain parties, such as Li Gang and his son in the Li Gang incident and result in

more times being shared and read. However, stories on *Renren* can consist of news items shared from other mainstream media, or videos from mainstream media and netizens, or personal opinions towards a news story, and the mix of news stories and personal views does not provide an objective snapshot of news and, overall, tends to shift to one-sided presentations of the story instead of presenting a comprehensive view.

Furthermore, the results of this study also partially negate the idea that the mainstream media in China always report the positive side of an event and neglect the potential negative problems, especially the ones that put the government in a negative light. As a matter of fact, it depends on what kind of story the mainstream media are reporting: in domestic news reporting, they provide more critical coverage than in international news coverage, and more in-depth reports compared with the reports on SNSs; in international news reporting, mainstream media are strictly adhering to the government's stance. These results indicate a need for further investigation of domestic and foreign news coverage in both traditional and alternative venues in authoritarian/transitional media systems like China's.

APPENDIX I

Code book for the Li Gang incident

Coding

The coding sheet starts with objective characteristics of articles: title of the publication, date of the publication, length of each article, followed by the general tone, frames and sources.

General Information

1. Coder Name: Simply write your first name
2. Control Number: Record the story number written at the top of each printed article
3. Date of publication: Identify the date the story was created or shared in the form of mm/dd/yyyy, and usually the date appears below the title. If no date is identified, please enter 00/00/0000.
4. Title of the article: Please write out the headline in its entirety.
5. Source: Record the data pool the story is from, “1” for Renren.com, “2” for Peopledaily.com
6. Type of the story: Identify the format the story adopts, “1” for text, “2” for picture, “3” for video, and “4” for multimedia. Any mixture of text, picture, video and other format should be coded as multimedia.
7. Times being shared: Record the times being shared until the story was collected, and the numbers can be found on the right edge below the whole story. This is only for posts from *Renren.com*, and code “0” for articles from *People’s Daily Online*.
8. Times being read: Record the times being read until the story was collected, and the numbers can be found on the right edge below the whole story. This is only for posts from *Renren.com*, and code “0” for articles from *People’s Daily Online*.
9. What is the dominant theme that you identify
 - 1) Official power play v.s. powerless mass
 - 2) Drunk drinking and hit and run
 - 3) Censorship resulted from powerful official or government
 - 4) Other
10. Is the subject treated
 - 0) superficially
 - 1) in-depth

If the article is cited from somewhere else, such as a mainstream media report, other people’s article, it is considered as superficial; on the other hand, if the article is created by the author itself with meaningful and deep thinking, then it is considered as in-depth.

General Tone

Question 11-14

Tone refers to the attitude of the stories toward each side. The tone towards one side can be positive, negative and neutral. If the story does not mention a party in

question, then code “N/A (Not Applicable)”. A story demonstrates a positive tone toward one side if it expressed sympathy and indicates support for this side. A story shows a negative tone towards one side if it reveals critical tendency or assigns blame to this side. A story exhibits a neutral tone when it only plainly states the fact or when it shows no demonstrable attitude toward the side in question.

Generic Frames

Question 15-25

Frames refer to the overarching frameworks journalists use to structure a story. The textual frames will be ascertained by analyzing the complete article asking two to five specific questions for each frame. The five generic frames and most of the measurements were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) study, but the original measurement of morality frame is not suitable for this situation, thus we developed two new questions. Each frame will be coded on a presence/absence basis per news article.

The *responsibility* frame focuses on party/individual who should be responsible for the issue, and is measured by questions “15. Does the story suggest that some party is responsible for the issue?; 16. Does the story suggest that some party have the ability to alleviate the problem?; 17. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?” For question 15, if the story suggests that some party should be blamed or responsible for the issue discussed in the story, then coders should select the party; otherwise, code “not suggested”. If multiple parties are to be blamed or responsible for the issue, then coders should identify the main issue, and main actors who should be responsible. As to question 16, if the story suggests that some party should do something to provide somewhat solutions or make things better, coders should select the party; otherwise, code “not suggested”. Again, if multiple parties show up, coders should identify the main issues and main actor. Lastly, if the story provides certain action or method to solve the problem, coders should code “yes”; otherwise, code “no”.

The *human interest* frame focuses on the individual story and is measured by items “18. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?; 19. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?; 20. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy caring, sympathy, or compassion?” If the story mentions a person or several people’s name with action, then code “yes” for question 18. If only name(s) mentioned to describe a phenomenon. For example, in this sentence: “since the ‘My father is Li Gang’ incident happened, the local government strongly censored media report”, although the name Li Gang is mentioned, but it is only used as a noun symbolize the incident, coders should code “no” based on this sentence. Question 19 means to test whether there are emotional laden words used in the story to give readers strong negative or positive feelings like sympathy, angry, extremely disgusting, sad, happy, etc. Similar to question 19, question 20 examines the visual information, which could generate feelings mentioned in question 19, either in pictures or videos or multimedia.

The *conflict* frames emphasize the discrepancy between people or organizations, and is measured by questions “21. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries ?; 22. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?; 23. Does the story refer to winners and losers?” For question 21, the disagreement or conflict can be other issues generated by Li Gang incident, such as the conflict between media and the university involved. Question 22 is designed to examine whether the story cite information from both sides who are in conflict, or only stands for one side.

The *morality* frame focuses on the culture and social norms. It is measured by questions: “Does the story mention wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son?; Does the story mention wrongdoings of other party?” The wrongdoings can be inferred from keywords synonymous for “blame, fault, mistake, negligence”.

Other

- 26. Does the article mention censorship?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
- 27. If yes, where does the censorship happen?
 - 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 - 1) University and local government
 - 2) Other

The first question, question 27, in this category deals with censorship. If the story includes such words “read this before it gets deleted”, “censor”, and other related terms, code “1”, otherwise, code “0”. As to question 28, if the story doesn’t mention censorship, then code “0”; if the story states that the government and university forbade such remarks, then code “1”; if the story states the media did not want to pick up the issue or some source for certain reasons, then code “1”; if the story doesn’t present obvious group or organization which are censoring the issue, then code “2”.

- 28. Does the article mention credibility of the media?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
- 29. If yes, does it question the credibility of the media?
 - 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 - 1) No
 - 2) Yes

The second theme in this category explores the credibility of the media in general. If the story mentioned the credibility of any media, code “1”; otherwise, code “0”. If the story doesn’t mention credibility, code “0”; if the story persuaded people not to believe the media’s reportage, then code “1”; if not, code “2”.

Sources

- 30. Number of sources cited in the news material
 - ____ Victims and their families
 - ____ Lawyer/lawyers of the victims

- ____ Li Gang and Li Qiming
- ____ Spectators
- ____ Students of Hebei University
- ____ Police
- ____ Officials from Hebei University
- ____ Government officials
- ____ Scholars and experts
- ____ others

Sources refer to persons, agencies or organizations cited in the story to provide background information, pertinent facts and data, and interpretation of events. Sources will be classified under the above-mentioned categories, and when the coder conduct the coding, just check the sources that are mentioned in the story. In a paragraph, if the source is continuously mentioned more than once, count only one time. For example, in a paragraph like this: Li Gang said: “.....”. He continued: “.....”, source Li Gang should be only counted once; otherwise, count as many as appeared.

APPENDIX II

Coding sheet for the Li Gang incident

General information

1. Control ID: _____
2. Coder Name: _____
3. Date of publication: __ __/ __ __/ __ __ __ __ (mm/dd/yyyy)
4. Title of the article: _____

-
5. Source: story from _____
 1) *Renren.com*
 2) *Peopledaily.com*
 6. Type of the story:
 1) Text
 2) Picture
 3) Video
 4) Multimedia
 7. Times being shared: _____
 8. Times being read: _____
 9. What is the dominant theme that you identify
 1) Official power play v.s. powerless mass
 2) Drunk driving and hit and run
 3) Censorship
 4) Other
 10. Is the subject treated
 1) Superficially
 2) In-depth

General Tone

11. What is the tone toward Li Gang and his son?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
12. What is the tone toward the victims?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
13. What is the tone toward government?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
14. What is the tone toward the University?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)

- 1) Positive
- 2) Neutral
- 3) Negative

Generic frames:

Attribution of Responsibility

15. Does the story suggest that some party is responsible for the issue?
 - 0) Not suggested
 - 1) Li Gang and his son, Li Qiming
 - 2) Victims and their families
 - 3) Government officials
 - 4) Witnesses
 - 5) Netizens
 - 6) Students of Hebei University
 - 7) Police
 - 8) Officials from Hebei University
 - 9) Others
16. Does the story suggest that some party have the ability to alleviate the problem?
 - 0) Not suggested
 - 1) Li Gang and his son, Li Qiming
 - 2) Victims and their families
 - 3) Government officials
 - 4) Witnesses
 - 5) Netizens
 - 6) Students of Hebei University
 - 7) Police
 - 8) Officials from Hebei University
 - 9) Others
17. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

Human Interest frame

18. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
19. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
20. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy caring, sympathy, or compassion?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

Conflict frame

21. Does the story reflect power struggle between government officials and the public?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

22. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
 0) No
 1) Yes
23. Does the story refer to winners and losers?
 0) No
 1) Yes

Morality frame

24. Does the story mention wrongdoings of Li Gang and his son?
 0) No
 1) Yes
25. Does the story mention wrongdoings of other party?
 0) No
 1) Yes

Other

26. Does the story mention censorship?
 0) No
 1) Yes
27. Where does the censorship happen?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) University and local government
 2) Other
28. Does the story mention credibility of the mainstream media?
 0) No
 1) Yes
29. Does it question the media's credibility?
 0) No
 1) Yes
 2) N/A (Not Applicable)

Sources:

30. Number of sources cited in the news material

☐ Victims and their families
☐ Lawyer/lawyers of the victims
☐ Li Gang and Li Qiming
☐ Witnesses
☐ Students of Hebei University
☐ Police
☐ Officials from Hebei University
☐ Government officials
☐ Scholars and experts
☐ Others

APPENDIX III

Codebook for the Diaoyu Island dispute

Coding

The coding sheet starts with objective characteristics of articles: title of the publication, date of the publication, length of each article, followed by the general tone, frames and sources.

General Information

1. **Coder Name:** Simply write your last name
2. **Control Number:** Record the story number written at the top of each printed article
3. **Date of publication:** Identify the date the story was created or shared in the form of mm/dd/yyyy, and usually the date appears below the title. If no date is identified, please enter 00/00/0000.
4. **Title of the article:** Please write out the headline in its entirety.
5. **Source:** Record the data pool the story is from, “1” for *Renren.com*, “2” for *Peopledaily.com*
6. **Type of the story:** Identify the format the story adopts, “1” for text, “2” for picture, “3” for video, and “4” for multimedia.
7. **Times being shared:** Record the times being shared until the story was collected, and the numbers can be found on the right edge below the whole story. This is only for posts from *Renren.com*, and code “N/A” for articles from *People’s Daily Online*.
8. **Times being read:** Record the times being read until the story was collected, and the numbers can be found on the right edge below the whole story. This is only for posts from *Renren.com*, and code “N/A” for articles from *People’s Daily Online*.
9. **What is the dominant theme that you identify, rank them according to the importance of each theme:**
 - 1) Territory dispute of Diaoyu Island
 - 2) Historical controversies and hatred towards Japanese, Japanese government and Japan
 - 3) Historical record and literature about Diaoyu Island
 - 4) Other

Main themes of the story are identified. To measure importance, the coder should combine the headline and the number of words together to make a judgment.
9. **Is the subject treated**
 - 1) superficially
 - 2) in-depth

If the article is cited from somewhere else, such as a mainstream media report, other people’s article, it is considered as superficial; on the other hand, if the article is created by the author itself with meaningful and deep thinking, then it is considered as in-depth.

General Tone

Question 11-14

Tone refers to the attitude of the stories toward each side. The tone towards one side can be positive, negative and neutral. A story demonstrates a positive tone toward one side if it expressed sympathy and indicates support for this side. A story shows a negative tone towards one side if it reveals critical tendency or assigns blame to this side. A story exhibits a neutral tone when its only plainly states the fact or when it shows no demonstrable attitude toward either side.

Generic Frames

Question 15-25

Frames refer to the overarching frameworks journalists use to structure a story. The textual frames will be ascertained by analyzing the complete article asking two to five specific questions for each frame. The five generic frames and most of the measurements were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study, but the original measurement of morality frame is not suitable for this situation, thus we developed two new questions. Each frame will be coded on a presence/absence basis per news article.

The *responsibility* frame focuses on party/individual who should be responsible for the issue, and is measured by questions "15. Does the story suggest that some party is responsible for the issue?; 16. Does the story suggest that some party have the ability to alleviate the problem?; 17. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?" For question 15, if the story suggests that some party should be blamed or responsible for the issue discussed in the story, then coders should select the party; otherwise, code "not suggested". If multiple parties are to be blamed or responsible for the issue, then coders should identify the main issue, and main actors who should be responsible. As to question 16, if the story suggests that some party should do something to provide somewhat solutions or make things better, coders should select the party; otherwise, code "not suggested". Again, if multiple parties show up, coders should identify the main issues and main actor. Lastly, if the story provides certain action or method to solve the problem, coders should code "yes"; otherwise, code "no".

The *human interest* frame focuses on the individual story and is measured by items "18. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?; 19. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?; 20. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy caring, sympathy, or compassion?" If the story mentions a person or several people's name with action, then code "yes" for question 18. If only name(s) mentioned to describe a phenomenon. For example, in this sentence: "since the 'My father is Li Gang' incident happened, the local government strongly censored media report", although the name Li Gang is mentioned, but it is only used as a noun symbolize the incident, coders should code "no" based on this sentence. Question 19 means to test whether there are emotional laden words used in the story to give readers strong negative or positive feelings like sympathy, angry, extremely disgusting, sad, happy, etc. Similar to question 19, question 20 examines the visual information, which could generate feelings mentioned in question 19, either in pictures or videos or multimedia.

The *conflict* frames emphasize the discrepancy between people or organizations, and is measured by questions “21. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries?; Does the story reflect the attitude of both governments after the incident happened?; Does the story include criticism towards one party or another?; 22. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?; 23. Does the story refer to winners and losers?” For question 21, the conflict is not confined as the Diaoyu Island dispute in 2010, rather including issues rekindled, or generated by the incident. Question 22 is designed to examine whether the story cite information from both sides who are in conflict, or only stands for one side.

The *morality* frame focuses on the culture and social norms. It is measured by questions: “24. Does the story mention wrongdoings of Japan?; 25. Does the story mention wrongdoings of other party?” The wrongdoings can be inferred from keywords synonymous for “blame, fault, mistake, negligence”.

Other

26. Does the article mention censorship?

- 2) No
- 3) Yes

27. Where does the censorship happen?

- 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
- 1) University and local government
- 2) Other

The first question, question 27, in this category deals with censorship. If the story includes such words “read this before it gets deleted”, “censor”, and other related terms, code “1”, otherwise, code “0”. As to question 28, if the story doesn’t mention censorship, then code “0”; if the story states that the government and university forbade such remarks, then code “1”; if the story states the media did not want to pick up the issue or some source for certain reasons, then code “1”; if the story doesn’t present obvious group or organization which are censoring the issue, then code “2”.

28. Does the article mention credibility of the media?

- 0) No
- 1) Yes

29. Does it question the credibility of the media?

- 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
- 1) No
- 2) Yes

The second theme in this category explores the credibility of the media in general. If the story mentioned the credibility of any media, code “1”; otherwise, code “0”. If the story doesn’t mention credibility, code “0”; if the story persuaded people not to believe the media’s reportage, then code “1”; if not, code “2”.

Sources

30. Number of sources cited in the news material

- ____ Ministry of foreign affairs of People's Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese
- ____ Government in general
- ____ Ministry of foreign affairs of Japan and Japanese Government in general
- ____ Scholars and experts
- ____ Public
- ____ Others

Sources refer to persons, agencies or organizations cited in the story to provide background information, pertinent facts and data, and interpretation of events. Sources will be classified under the following categories, and when the coder conduct the coding, just fill in the number of the sources that are mentioned in the story. In a paragraph, if the source is continuously mentioned more than once, count only one time.

APPENDIX IV

Coding sheet for the Diaoyu Island dispute

General information

1. Control ID: _____
 2. Coder Name: _____
 3. Date of publication: __ __/ __ __/ __ __ __ __ (mm/dd/yyyy)
 4. Title of the article: _____
-
5. Source: news from _____
 1) *Renren.com*
 2) *Peopledaily.com*
 6. Type of the story:
 1) Text
 2) Picture
 3) Video
 4) Multimedia
 7. Times being shared: _____
 8. Times being read: _____
 9. What is the dominant theme that you identify:
 1) Territory dispute of Diaoyu Island
 2) Historical controversies and hatred towards Japanese, Japanese government and Japan
 3) Historical record and literature about Diaoyu Island
 4) Other
 10. Is the subject treated
 1) Superficially
 2) In-depth

General Tone

11. Tone towards Japanese government, Japanese, and Japan
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
12. Tone towards Japanese police
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
13. Tone towards Chinese government
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Positive
 2) Neutral
 3) Negative
14. Tone towards Chinese captain

- 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
- 1) Positive
- 2) Neutral
- 3) Negative

Generic frames:

Attribution of Responsibility

15. Does the story suggest that some party is responsible for the issue?
 - 0) Not suggested
 - 1) Japanese government
 - 2) Chinese government
 - 3) Other
16. Does the story suggest that some party have the ability to alleviate the problem?
 - 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 - 1) Japanese government
 - 2) Chinese government
 - 3) Other
17. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

Human Interest frame

18. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
19. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
20. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy caring, sympathy, or compassion?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

Conflict frame

21. Does the story reflect the territorial disputes over Diaoyu Island between China and Japan?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
22. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes
23. Does the story refer to winners and losers?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

Morality frame

24. Does the story mention wrongdoings of Japan?
 - 0) No
 - 1) Yes

25. Does the story mention wrongdoings of other party?
 0) No
 1) Yes

Other

26. Does the story mention censorship?
 0) No
 1) Yes
27. If yes, where does the censorship happen?
 0) N/A (Not Applicable)
 1) Government
 2) Other
28. Does the story mention credibility of the mainstream media?
 0) No
 1) Yes
29. If yes, does it question the media's credibility?
 0) No
 1) Yes
 2) N/A (Not Applicable)

Sources:

30. Number of sources cited in the news material
 _____ Ministry of foreign affairs of People's Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese government in general
 _____ Ministry of foreign affairs of Japan and Japanese Government in general
 _____ Scholars and experts
 _____ Public
 _____ Others

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TABLES

Table 1: Intercoder reliability of Li Gang incident

Variable	Intercoder Reliability (Cohen's Kappa)	Degree of Similarity
Control ID		100%
Date of Publication		100%
Title		100%
Source of the Story		100%
Time Shared		100%
Time Read		100%
Theme	1.00	
Treated	1.00	
Tone Li Gang	1.00	
Tone Victim	1.00	
Responsibility	0.928	
Ability		100%
Solution	1.00	
Personal Life	1.00	
Adjective	1.00	
Visual	0.857	
Conflict	0.828	
Two Side	1.00	
Winner		100%
Wrongdoing Li Gang	0.894	
Wrongdoing Others	1.00	
Censor	1.00	
Where Censor		100%
Credibility	1.00	
Question Credibility		100%
Sources	Intercoder Reliability (Pearson Correlation)	
Victim	1.00**	
Li Gang	1.00**	
Witness	1.00**	
Student	0.925	
Police	1.00**	
University	1.00**	
Government		100%
Others	1.00**	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Since some variable's Kappa or Pearson Correlation value cannot be computed, they are measured instead by the degree of similarity.

Table 2: Intercoder reliability of the Diaoyu Island dispute

Variable	Intercoder Reliability (Cohen's Kappa)	Degree of Similarity
Control ID		100%
Date of Publication		100%
Title		100%
Source of the Story		100%
Time Shared		100%
Time Read		100%
Theme	0.924	
treated	1.00	
Tone Japan	1.00	
Tone China	1.00	
Responsibility		100%
Ability		100%
Solution	1.00	
Personal Life	1.00	
Adjective	1.00	
Visual		100%
Conflict		100%
Two Side	1.00	
Winner	0.777	
Wrongdoing Li Gang	0.901	
Wrongdoing Others	0.862	
Censor		100%
Where Censor		100%
Credibility		100%
Question Credibility		100%
Sources	Intercoder Reliability (Pearson Correlation)	
China	0.803**	
Japan	1.00**	
Scholar	0.852**	
Public	1.00**	
Others	0.989**	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Since some variable's Kappa or Pearson Correlation value cannot be computed, they are measured instead by the degree of similarity.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA. Differences in sharing and reading story type

Dependent/ Factor	Text	Picture	Video	Multimedia	DF	F
Share	2236	18279	12403	2595	3	7.42**
Read	6580	259812	103036	6373	3	20.93**

N=219

ANOVA significant at **p<.01 level.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA. Difference in sharing and reading by superficiality

Dependent/ Factor	Superficially	In-depth	DF	F
Share	4931	6970	1	0.475
Read	36767	35246	1	0.005

N=219

ANOVA significant at **p<.01 level.

Table 5. Independent-samples T-tests. Differences in sharing and reading by emotive words and visual information

Test/Group	Adj	No Adj	T	Visual	No Visual	T
Share	9957	1277	-2.34**	8925	4061	-1.98**
Read	65570	5626	-2.34**	72470	25066	-2.68**

N=219

T-tests significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 6. Independent-samples T-tests. Differences in tone

Variables/Sources	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	T-test	DF
ToneLG	2.58	2.47	1.43	184
ToneVC	1.71	1.83	-1.58**	184
N	105	81		
ToneJP	2.68	2.44	3.81**	242
ToneCN	2.10	1.98	2.26**	242
N	114	130		

Tone was coded: 1) =Positive, 2) =Neutral, 3) =Negative.

T-tests significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 7: Differences in censorship mentioned by website and case

Case/Sources	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Li Gang	41	35	0.71
N	105	81	
Diaoyu	21	0	24.84*
N	114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 8: Descriptive analysis of the exact censorship mentioned on *Renren*

Case/From	University and local government	Not Specified	Case/From	Media and government	Not Specified
Li Gang	77%	23%	Diaoyu	10%	90%
N	105			114	

Table 9: Differences in credibility mentioned by website and case

Sources /Case	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-Square
Li Gang	13	9	0.52
N	105	81	
Diaoyu	0	0	N/A
N	114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 10. Differences in themes between *Renren* and *People's Daily*

Case	Theme	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Li Gang	All themes	100	100	6.97*
	Power play	55	56	0.00
	Hit-and-run	1	5	2.77
	Censorship	12	4	4.37*
	Other	31	36	0.83
N		105	81	
Diaoyu	All themes	100	100	27.53**
	Dispute	75	57	9.95**
	Historical issues	6	0	8.22**
	Record	0	10	12.04**
	Other	18	33	8.49*
N		144	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 11. Differences in responsibility frames in the Li Gang incident

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Responsible				12.59*
	N/A	48%	28%	
	Li Gang	44%	65%	
	Victims	0%	0%	
	Government	0%	1%	
	Witness	0%	0%	
	Netizens	0%	0%	
	Students	0%	1%	
	University	0%	0%	
	Police	3%	1%	
	Others	6%	3%	
Ability to solve				11.64*
	N/A	82%	85%	
	Li Gang	7%	5%	
	Victims	0%	0%	
	Government	0%	6%	
	Witness	0%	0%	
	Netizens	0%	0%	
	Students	0%	1%	
	University	0%	0%	
	Police	3%	1%	
	Others	6%	3%	
Solution				0.07
	No	84%	85%	
	Yes	16%	15%	
N		105	81	

Chi-square significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ levels.

Table 12. Differences in human interest frames in the Li Gang incident

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Personal				1.80
	No	9%	4%	
	Yes	91%	96%	
Adjective				9.71**
	No	30%	53%	
	Yes	70%	47%	
Visual				22.10**
	No	65%	94%	
	Yes	35%	6%	
N		105	81	

Chi-square significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ levels.

Table 13. Differences in conflict frames in the Li Gang incident

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Conflict	No	14%	14%	0.02
	Yes	86%	86%	
Two side	No	94%	86%	3.41
	Yes	6%	14%	
Winner	No	98%	99%	1.29
	Yes	2%	1%	
N		105	81	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 14. Differences in morality frames in the Li Gang incident

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Li Gang	No	39%	12%	16.38**
	Yes	61%	88%	
Others	No	46%	62%	4.70*
	Yes	54%	38%	
N		105	81	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 15. Differences in responsibility frames in the Diaoyu Island dispute

	Who should be responsible	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Responsible	N/A	33%	49%	11.85**
	Japan	56%	43%	
	China	6%	1%	
	Other	5%	7%	
Ability	N/A	63%	95%	45.06**
	Japan	17%	3%	
	China	19%	0.0%	
	Other	1%	2%	
Solution	No	61%	91%	29.62**
	Yes	39%	9%	
N		114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 16. Differences in human interest frames in the Diaoyu Island dispute

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Personal	No	11%	15%	1.26
	Yes	89%	86%	
Adjective	No	44%	80%	34.08**
	Yes	57%	20%	
Visual	No	86% ⁸	100%	19.53**
	Yes	14%	0%	
N		114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 17. Differences in conflict frames in the Diaoyu Island dispute

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Conflict	No	5%	30%	24.71**
	Yes	95%	70%	
Two side	No	63%	63%	0.00
	Yes	37%	37%	
Winner	No	96%	100%	5.82*
	Yes	4%	0%	
N		114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 18. Differences in morality frames in the Diaoyu Island dispute

		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	Chi-square
Japan	No	31%	51%	10.84**
	Yes	69%	49%	
Others	No	67%	85%	10.93**
	Yes	33%	15%	
N		114	130	

Chi-square significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 19. Independent-samples T-tests. Differences in sourcing in the Li Gang case

Case	Sources		T-test
	<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	
All source	4.30	3.10	1.63
Victims	1.00	0.40	2.02*
Laywer	0.30	0.10	1.60
Li Gang	0.29	0.40	-0.75
Witnesses	0.23	0.09	1.03
Students	0.33	0.12	1.76
Police	0.17	0.44	-2.86**
U Officials	0.18	0.05	1.52
G officials	0.10	0.19	-1.02
Scholars	0.14	0.05	0.89
Others	1.52	1.21	0.99
	105	81	

T-tests significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.

Table 20. Independent-samples t-tests. Differences in sourcing in the Diaoyu case

Case	Sources	Mean Values		T-test
		<i>Renren</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>	
Diaoyu	Total number of sources	2.79	4.46	-3.46**
	China	0.82	0.97	-0.88
	Japan	0.61	0.68	-0.43
	Scholar	0.34	1.71	-4.18**
	Public	0.06	0.01	2.37*
	Other	0.96	1.10	-0.64
N		114	130	

T-tests significant at *p<.05, **p<.01 levels.